

SciFpress

Enterprise — Log Entries 86



a
Star Trek
fanzine

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Illustrations - Sandy Sapatka Cover		
	Christa Richter	P 2
	Ann Humphrey	P 60, 64

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Editors - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini
Typing - Valerie Piacentini, Sheila Clark, Karen Sparks
Proofreading - Janet Quarton, Sheila Clark & Valerie Piacentini
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Printing - Urban Print, 57 Perth Road, Dundee
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Sheila Clark
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ScoTpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona

Hello, and welcome to Log Entries 86

We don't normally put out specific Christmas issues, but since we have a number of seasonal contributions on hand, and since this issue should be due to go out in December, we have decided to use them together. We hope that you enjoy the zine, and we would like to wish you all a very happy Christmas, and all the best for the New Year.

Since typing the above, news has come in of the death of Gene Roddenberry. Everyone who loves Star Trek shares the sadness of this time, yet we should all remember the great gift he gave us, the dream that we all share in our appreciation of the world he created. As a writer himself, I think it must have pleased him to know how many people discovered a love of writing and a talent for it as a result of the inspiration he gave.



I'VE ALWAYS KNOWN

by

Brenda Kelsey

Lord, but that sounded so pompous. I'm not surprised that Bones had a dig at me.

EGO - that's what the problem is. When all is said and done, it's down to my monumental ego.

WHY ME?

At least other people get to ask, "Will it happen to me?" and worry about it in a defused and woolly way when they've nothing better to do.

I KNOW.

I know what's going to happen. I got to find out my future in no uncertain terms. I'm going to go senile. I'm going to degenerate into a drooling, snivelling wreck who'll turn on his friends when they try to help him, when they try to protect him.

I'm glad I have no clear memories of that time. I'm glad I don't remember what it's going to be like to feel my memories, my personality, dribble away.

I can only recall such a vast sorrow, a grief so huge that it seemed to fill the universe.

Was that me, grieving for myself? For what I had become? Mourning all that was lost to me?

I watched the recordings of me - us. I saw how I fell apart, and how the others did not. At least they'll be spared that bitterest of torments.

I'm sure that I abused Spock; it would be in keeping with the way my personality disordered as I got older - blaming everyone, accusing them of plotting against me when all they were doing was trying to protect me.

Scotty and Bones stayed 'normal' - they kept their identities and their memories. Of all the recordings, I cherish the image of Bones in Sickbay. Old and frail, still worrying at the problem of our premature aging, still fighting, not giving in until he found an answer.

And Spock, oh so dignified and stately, almost serene, still supporting me, coming with me to the Bridge and risking his life to help me over that last hurdle - facing the crew again - instead of staying in Sickbay to be de-aged.

Scotty, too, sitting quietly, not raging and roaring as I did, just calmly not making a fuss, supportive, believing that Bones and Spock could do something just one more time.

How I hated the idea that one day my body would house the scattering remnants of my intellect. Better to end it all while I'm young - before that happens again.

All those crazy risks. Rock climbing, oh my stars!

At least now I've come to some sort of truce with my fears, almost an acceptance of what will happen to me. No, I don't like it, and the very idea still gives me nightmares - but what alternative do I have?

The only alternative to getting older, a natural product of life, is death. And if I die now, while I'm still relatively young, I'll miss so much of what could be.

Bones and Spock will be privately relieved when they realise that I've stopped courting death.

I can't really explain to them why, though, because Bones will ground me for sure for thinking that I've found one of the fundamental truths of the Universe.

GETTING OLDER IS JUST LIKE EATING GARLIC BREAD.

You can do it on your own, but it gets to be boring and will register unpleasant side effects for the people that you meet; but if you do it in good company then you get a lot of pleasure out of it, and nobody seems to mind too much.

THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

On the first day of Christmas Starfleet gave to me
The Enterprise, my lovely lady.
On the second day of Christmas Starfleet gave to me
Two well loved friends, and the Enterprise, my lovely lady.
On the third day of Christmas Starfleet sent to me
Three Klingon fighters, etc
On the fourth day of Christmas Starfleet sent to me
Four birds of prey,
On the fifth day of Christmas Starfleet sent to me
Five children chanting,
On the sixth day of Christmas Starfleet sent to me
Six Vulcans mating,
On the seventh day of Christmas Starfleet sent to me
Seven crazy bridge crew,
On the eighth day of Christmas Starfleet sent to me
Eight Harry Mudds,
On the ninth day of Christmas Starfleet sent to me
Nine lovely ladies, (whoopie!),
On the tenth day of Christmas Starfleet sent to me
Ten days of diplomacy,
On the eleventh day of Christmas Starfleet sent to me
Eleven million tribbles, (aargh!),
On the twelfth day of Christmas Starfleet gave to me
Instant insanity!

Christine J Jones

A WHITE CHRISTMAS

by

Sandy Catchick

The Vulcan First Officer of the Enterprise sighed inwardly as he walked past Sickbay and his sensitive ears picked out the sound of Bing Crosby singing 'I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas' for the 34th time since the start of this Christmas season, officially a mere 4 days ago. Humans were never logical, but at Christmas they seemed to undergo a time of complete madness. Worse still, from Spock's point of view, they expected everyone else to share this madness with them.

As though to confirm his thoughts the Sickbay doors swooshed open and Dr McCoy came out, humming almost in time with Mr Crosby. Spotting the tall, lean frame of the First Officer ahead of him, McCoy yelled,

"Hey Spock, you're just the man I need!"

Spock turned back to the Doctor, his ears assaulted by the totally unnecessary and almost painful shout, and his Vulcan dignity affronted by the term 'Hey'. Spock's response - a slight inclination of the head and the single word "Doctor" - should have warned McCoy that Spock did not share his high spirits. However, Spock rarely showed any feelings - except curiosity, of course - and McCoy saw nothing untoward in the Vulcan's response.

The Doctor proceeded to confirm Spock's worst fears by grabbing the Vulcan's arm and dragging him into Sickbay, giving him no chance to refuse. He then dropped a roll of multicoloured foil garland into Spock's other hand and said, "I figured if we run that from here to just above the medicine cabinet that will brighten the place up a bit, don't you think? I can't quite reach myself."

Spock hurriedly extracted his arm from the Doctor's grip and responded to what he believed to be a genuine question. "Doctor, I do not think the aesthetic appeal of Sickbay will be..."

"That was not a question, Spock," interrupted McCoy exasperatedly.

"Indeed it was, Doctor," disputed Spock, still thinking literally.

McCoy sighed, not bothering to hide his all-too-Human feelings. "No, Spock, I meant it was not meant to be a question."

The Vulcan raised a single eyebrow and replied, "In that case, Doctor, you should not have phrased it as one. Perhaps you could clarify your meaning?"

McCoy stared at Spock in disbelief, wondering for a moment if he was joking, but Spock was leaning forward earnestly in his usual listening posture, obviously expecting a reply. The Doctor sighed again, more loudly this time.

"Never mind, Spock. Forget it. Just hang that up for me."

Spock's "As you wish, Doctor" reminded McCoy that Spock did not share his enthusiasm for Christmas decorations.

Spock reached up above the door and hung the garland as requested. McCoy continued the conversation.

"You know, Spock, you don't know what you're missing by not joining in these Christmas preparations wholeheartedly. Sometimes I feel sorry for you."

Spock was beginning to feel sorry for himself as McCoy directed him further. "Now, just twist that a few more times before you hang the other end. No, hang on a minute, just a little bit left. No, down a bit..."

"A 'little bit' is not a precise term, Doctor. If you could be more specific and indicate..."

Again the Vulcan was not allowed to complete his sentence. "Hold it right there, Spock. That's perfect, just perfect."

The Vulcan completed hanging the rather bright garland and made for the door, as hastily as Vulcan decorum would allow. He didn't quite make it. McCoy trapped him again.

"Before you go, Spock, perhaps you could put the fairy on the tree for me? It won't take a minute."

Spock swallowed his pride, realising that compliance was likely to be the quickest route to escape. He placed the proffered fairy on the tree, adjusting it 5 times until the Doctor was satisfied with the angle, and then exited with an "If you will excuse me, Doctor, I must report for duty" that sounded strained to his own ears.

McCoy didn't seem to notice as he yelled after the hastily retreating Vulcan, "Thanks, Spock. We could do with some help decorating the main rec room later this afternoon, if you're free."

The Vulcan's agile mind had thought up over a hundred reasons why he would be required to remain on duty all afternoon before he had even reached the turbolift. If McCoy had known he would have been horrified that Spock was, as he saw it, regressing so far into his Vulcan half. Spock took some satisfaction in having his sensible, logical Vulcan half to fall back on as the Humans around him fell apart before his very eyes.

The Bridge was a safe haven of sanity in a ship gone mad. Not a single garland or piece of tinsel could be seen. With some relief Spock took his place at the science station, wondering if anyone would notice he was 2.65 minutes late in reporting for duty. He didn't want any questions asked. He wasn't sure how he could phrase 'hanging a garland in Sickbay' in a detached, Vulcan way.

He need not have worried. He was saved by the fact that Captain Kirk was even later. Twelve point two four minutes late for duty, to be precise. No-one dared to ask Kirk where he'd been. It was obvious from the still way he held himself and the time it took him to ease himself into the command chair that the Captain was suffering from a headache.

Kirk stared unseeingly at the bridge screen for so long that the Vulcan began to fear for his state of health. He was just about to ask the Captain if he felt ill when Kirk seemed to snap out of it and said, "Mr. Spock, report."

The Vulcan reported, "All quiet, Captain." He couldn't quite bring himself to say 'normal'. There was nothing normal about a shipload of Humans preparing to celebrate Christmas.

Routine prevailed as they approached the next planet on their scheduled route, currently visible as a pale yellow ball on the forward viewscreen. Chekov plotted a course for an inspection orbit, taking them over the largest land masses. Sulu piloted the Enterprise smoothly onto the required course. Uhura confirmed that communications were under observation and hailing frequencies were open. Spock studied the readouts on his science console, bent over his hooded viewer in a posture familiar to the bridge crew. Kirk watched him fondly for a moment before asking his usual question.

"Analysis, Mr. Spock?"

The Vulcan reported in his usual steady voice. The planet was Class M, atmosphere breathable, although there were indications of high gravity and even higher temperatures. There were no life form readings, not even animals. Beyond that there was nothing out of the ordinary.

Kirk was about to switch off when a minute change in Spock's tone drew his attention.

"Captain, I am picking up indications of a large building." The Vulcan showed no outward sign of excitement, but Kirk guessed correctly that his insatiable curiosity had been aroused.

"Speculation?" Kirk asked, smiling.

The calm response "Insufficient data" was the one Kirk expected. His First Officer was not only the best in the Fleet, but a close personal friend. Spock hated to speculate without sufficient facts and was, Kirk thought, curiously afraid of making a guess - something Kirk put down to his internal battle between his Human and Vulcan halves and his need to appear fully Vulcan. Yet Kirk knew that his First Officer's intuition, even if not openly recognised by its owner, was frequently accurate. Out of respect for his friend's wishes and needs, though, Kirk only pushed him to speculate without facts when it was really necessary. This was not such a time.

Uhura supplied the next part of the jigsaw. "I'm picking up something on very low gain, but it's definitely a communication of some sort. It's nothing I can identify, and the translators can make nothing of it."

Kirk asked for the communication to be put on audio. The whine that came from Uhura's communications station sounded more like the squawk Kirk got from his communicator when it was malfunctioning than any attempt to make contact.

Uhura, meeting his glance, responded to the unasked question. "I'm sorry, Captain, I can't make anything of it."

Spock supplied the answer. "The sound is coming from the building identified by the ship's sensors, Captain. It is also the

source of the energy readings. I believe it is some kind of machine language."

So, thought Kirk, *Spock must have been speculating in his own mind at least*. "Can you translate?" he asked, without any real hope of an affirmative response.

Spock bent over his hooded viewer and continued to analyse his readings without comment. After a long moment he raised his head and looked directly at his Captain. "It is a high-level computer language, Captain, more advanced than anything known to the Federation. It is impossible to decode it without more time."

Kirk's interest was really aroused now, and he could tell from the way Spock bent back over the viewer that the Vulcan was intrigued. It was an enigma - a civilisation more advanced than any in the Federation, and a planet with no signs of animals or people. "This would seem to be worth investigation, wouldn't you say, Spock?" he asked cheerfully, thinking of the break in routine that it would offer.

"Indeed," was the quiet response, but Kirk caught the gleam of interest in the dark eyes and smiled to himself. His headache was forgotten now that he had something worthwhile to do.

The Enterprise continued to orbit the yellow planet while the crew checked and rechecked their data, adding to the store of information on the planet classified as LDZ42. No further buildings were revealed in spite of sensor sweeps criss-crossing the planet's surface. No life form readings were picked up.

Kirk made up his mind. "Dr McCoy, report for landing party duty. Mr Landon, Mr Sidwell, please report to the bridge."

Predictably, McCoy contacted the bridge from Sickbay asking for further information. Spock filled him in, his ears again assaulted by a rendition of 'White Christmas' coming through the intercom.

Kirk gathered Spock and a pleased Chekov for landing party duty with a nod as he headed for the turbolift, leaving Sulu with the con. Uhura wished them luck and quietly began to hum "I'm dreaming of...", indicating that she too had heard the background music from Sickbay. Spock had to admit that her rendition was rather more melodic than the Doctor's earlier attempt, but he was nevertheless grateful to be escaping to Planet LDZ42.

The Lieutenant caught his eye, and seeming to read his mind without benefit of telepathy called sweetly after him, "Enjoy yourself, Mr Spock, Christmas is coming!"

Both Spock's eyebrows disappeared into his hairline as he followed the Captain into the turbolift.

As usual McCoy was the last to arrive. He entered the transporter room on the run, checking his mediscanner a final time before joining the others on the pads.

The Captain's order, "Energise!" was still ringing in their ears when they materialised on the planet, just outside the building. Spock, accustomed to the heat and gravity of Vulcan by physiology if not by recent experience, felt comfortable in the dry,

heavy atmosphere of the planet.

McCoy, however, expressed the feelings of the others. "It's like a blast furnace down here," he said.

Spock was silently thankful that the temperature had taken the Doctor's mind off sleighbells in the snow. He and Chekov unslung their tricorders and began taking readings.

"The energy readings are coming from within the building, Captain," Spock confirmed as the four of them headed towards the ominously large entrance. He reported their safe landing before assisting Chekov to slide back the heavy doors.

The building itself was like any large storage building or warehouse, but made of material the same sand colour as its surroundings, so that from a distance it would be almost undetectable. Inside, however, it was a different matter. Bank upon bank of computers sparkled in varying colours as bright as McCoy's sickbay garlands. The occasional light flashed on the consoles, reminding both the Doctor and the First Officer of Sickbay's Christmas tree.

McCoy looked at Spock and bantered, "Looks like Christmas has come early for you, Mr. Spock." As the Vulcan raised an eyebrow in query he added, "All those computers to play with."

Spock responded, "These are not toys, Doctor," in his most icy tone.

Kirk forestalled an argument by directing them all to investigate.

Spock cautioned, "I would recommend that we touch nothing until we know what these computers are programmed for, Captain."

Kirk nodded his agreement, and the landing party spread out.

An hour later found them no nearer deciphering the computer language or understanding the reason for such a massive installation on an otherwise barren planet. Spock requested permission to return to the ship to use his library computers on a theory he was forming. Kirk felt his first sense of elation since they had arrived; if Spock was beginning to form a theory then the chances were good that this installation would soon be explained.

Half an hour later the remainder of the landing party were no further forward. Kirk contacted the ship, to be told by Uhura that Spock was still working in the main computer room. He advised her that the landing party would remain on the planet for a further hour, and if nothing new turned up they would then beam back to the Enterprise.

Kirk returned his communicator to his belt and turned in time to see Chekov trip over a loose plate in the metal flooring and crash back into one of the computers.

McCoy hurried over, seeing red oozing from a cut on the young Navigator's hand. "You should be more careful, young man," he said, smiling. "You don't want to miss the Christmas party, do you?"

As he spoke the Doctor leaned back against the console and searched in his medikit. Unwittingly he simultaneously tripped three switches with the back of his hand.

Chekov was left staring into space as McCoy and Kirk sparkled out of existence before his eyes. Worriedly he took out his communicator and signalled the ship.

The bridge was having its own problems. Spock, who had just returned from the computer room, had been advising Mr Sulu that he would be returning to the planet, and leaving him with the con, when he suddenly disappeared without trace.

Chekov's worried communication was met with an exchange of glances around the bridge, supercharging the already electric atmosphere. Sulu took charge and ordered Chekov beamed back on board, then called a meeting in the briefing room. Scott was called away from his precious engines to join them. Sensors revealed no sign of the missing officers on the planet below or in nearby space.

Uhura offered the only comfort. "At least they're all together. They'll take care of one other," she said.

Kirk, Spock and McCoy materialised together in a cold, white, mountainous landscape. McCoy's "What the...?" and Kirk's "Spock, how did you get here?" soon turned to expressions of concern as the Vulcan put a hand to his head.

"Spock, are you in pain? Where does it hurt?" McCoy asked worriedly, searching for the medikit that somehow had not materialised with him.

Spock was silent for so long that the Doctor and Captain exchanged worried glances over his bowed head. Finally the Vulcan straightened and turned to Kirk.

"Captain, I have just experienced an alien presence searching through my mind," he said. In a whisper he added, "It now knows everything I know. I could not prevent it." The last was torn from him almost involuntarily.

It was obvious that the Vulcan was deeply upset by the experience. Kirk knew that Spock was an extremely private person, and he knew also that an individual's mind was sacred to all Vulcans. They would never dream of melding with another without their express permission. Spock would have fought hard to prevent anyone reading his mind without such permission. He and the Captain had shared mind melds before, and Kirk knew how hard Spock found it to lower his barriers just a little, even to a friend with whom he wanted to share his deepest thoughts. To have those barriers forced by an alien would be a terrible experience for him.

Kirk didn't know what to say to ease his friend's pain, so he gently touched the blue-clad shoulder. Instead of relaxing under the Captain's touch as he often had before, Spock tensed and pulled violently away, fearful of his barriers being breached again.

McCoy, observing the exchange, shook his head when Kirk tried to put out his hand a second time. The Captain nodded his understanding and withdrew. This was something Spock would have to overcome on his own. Kirk was reminded of the experiences with the

Platonians who had forced emotion - tears and laughter - from the normally controlled Vulcan. Spock had suffered greatly, but had eventually come to terms with the experience.

The three stood silently while Spock recovered, outwardly at least, from the mental contact.

Finally, in a more normal voice, Spock asked, "Did you feel an alien presence in your minds too?"

Kirk shook his head, but McCoy, shifting his feet uncomfortably, said, "Yes. Yes, Spock, I think I felt something touch my mind when we were in that building with the computers. Do you think that's what brought us here?"

After another long pause Spock said, "I believe we have been transported here by those computers, Captain."

McCoy's questions were aimed at taking Spock's mind off his recent experience. "Where's here, and why the three of us?"

He was successful. Spock responded with a calm, "Unknown, but since you were on the planet and I on the Enterprise, we must have been chosen for a reason."

McCoy caught Kirk's eye. The three stared at one another, the understanding between them asserting itself and giving them the strength to face the unknown together.

No equipment had materialised with them, but they were all still in Starfleet uniform. Kirk took the lead.

"Since we appear to be on a mountain, I suggest we try to climb down. That way looks easiest."

Spock's "Logical, Captain" was the last word spoken for a long time as they fell into step on the steep downward path.

They walked steadily down through thick snow. An hour had passed when more snow began to fall in large, soft flakes. McCoy shivered and, suddenly alarmed, looked over at Spock. Vulcan was a hot, dry planet, and Spock was not built to survive on a cold, damp one like this.

McCoy cleared his throat. "Spock, are you okay?" he asked.

The Vulcan looked up and responded, "I am functional, Doctor."

McCoy snorted, but since there was nothing he could do he didn't press the point. There was no shelter in sight, and none of them even had a coat to offer the Vulcan. Silently McCoy wished that the cold would at least take Spock's mind off his other troubles.

Another hour passed and the ground began to flatten out below them, forming a valley. They were still at quite a height, and had a long way to go, but it was relief of a sort.

McCoy looked around and suddenly ran forward. "Hey, I think I recognise this! Jim, Spock, you're not going to believe this, but..."

His voice tailed off as Spock continued walking, oblivious of

the Doctor and of his surroundings.

Kirk and McCoy broke into a run and soon caught up with him. Spock plodded on mechanically, head bowed against the snow, ignoring the uneven ground under his feet. McCoy put out a hand and held the Vulcan's arm. Spock continued to attempt to walk, resisting the Doctor's best efforts to hold him. McCoy touched his hand, and gasped; the normally hot-blooded Vulcan felt like ice.

Kirk voiced his concern. "Bones, is he...?"

McCoy, concern making him short-tempered as always, shouted back, "How should I know?", then added in a more normal tone, "He could be in a trance to conserve his energy. We've got to get him warm soon. Why didn't he say something?"

Even as McCoy spoke he knew that Spock would have called him illogical. There was nothing any of them could do on the mountain. None of them had clothes or equipment for this weather. It would be illogical to worry them when they could do nothing for him.

McCoy finally managed to halt the struggling Vulcan, who remained standing, his eyes completely vacant and his face a frozen mask. With a jolt McCoy remembered what he had seen.

"Jim, I think we're on Earth. Not only that, but this looks mighty like Virginia to me!"

Kirk said, "Not now, Bones. I'm more interested in..."

He didn't finish the sentence. The sound of an approaching aircar made them both whirl round. Spock remained facing the direction in which they had been heading, those sharp Vulcan ears now useless.

The car approached them, and a man got out and ran towards them, his black, yellow and red checked jacket a welcome sight in the bleak, frozen, white landscape. He shouted to them in perfect English, with a soft Virginian drawl.

"What are you guys doing out here dressed like that? You'll freeze to death."

Kirk smiled with relief. He had started to explain that their transport had broken down when he realised that the man wasn't looking at him, but had his attention focused not even on Spock, but on McCoy. A wild rebel yell broke the silence as the man performed the equivalent of a war dance in the snow and yelled, "Len! You son of a gun - what're you doing here?"

McCoy was astounded. "Phil? It can't be! Thank god you found us!" Then remembering Spock he added, "Look, Phil, my friend's in trouble. He's a Vulcan, and it's just too cold for him. We've got to get him into the warm, and urgently."

Phil wasted no time on stupid questions. He ran back to the aircar and produced some blankets. They bundled Spock into them, then into the back seat of the aircar, held firmly between Kirk and McCoy. Phil returned to the front seat and sped them down the mountain.

Some minutes later Kirk felt eyes on his and looked down to meet two weary brown eyes in a pale face that somehow sought to

reassure him. Kirk leaned towards Spock, and far from being reassured found the Vulcan shivering uncontrollably in spite of the blankets. The call "Bones!" that sprang to his lips was stilled in his throat as the brown eyes voiced a mute appeal. Kirk wondered what logic Spock had for not wishing to disturb the Doctor - perhaps the fact that he could still do nothing for the Vulcan, and would only worry. Spock, knowing that Kirk understood, closed his eyes and concentrated on attempting to control his shivering body.

McCoy, however, was not Chief Medical Officer of the Enterprise for nothing. After a few more minutes he voiced his worry. "I hope Spock manages to stay in trance until we reach Phil's place. If he comes out of it too early it could be dangerous for him."

Kirk grunted an acknowledgement, but the sudden glint of worry that flashed in his eyes was not so easily hidden.

McCoy was practised at reading these two men above all others. His "Jim, why didn't you say something?" was cut short by the Vulcan's "He was endeavouring to cover for me at my request, Doctor", which came out as a strained whisper.

McCoy's anger turned to concern and then to real worry as his hands touched the Vulcan's shivering form and his eyes locked with the pain-filled brown ones that were too weak to hide the Vulcan's predicament. McCoy voiced his racing thoughts.

"I'm so sorry, Spock. I always wanted you and Jim to see Phil's mountain in the winter and to experience a real Southern Christmas, but not like this!"

Spock's "It is not logical for you to feel guilty, Doctor, since this is not of your doing" was met with what seemed to the Vulcan an even greater display of Human illogic.

"But I do feel guilty, Spock. I've always dreamed of you and Jim spending Christmas with me with Phil and Anne. Now it's coming true it's not at all what I had in mind, with you close to death and me without medical facilities. Even the warmth of Phil's cabin may not be enough to save you - we both know that. You need the medical facilities of the Enterprise. Somehow it's all my fault."

Spock's "Fascinating" was the last thing Kirk and McCoy heard from him as he suddenly disappeared from the aircar as though he had never been there. Captain and Doctor stared at each other in disbelief, both wondering if Spock's presence and their own was an alien illusion planted in their minds.

Spock materialised in the Sickbay of the USS Enterprise before the astounded eyes of Nurse Chapel. After an instant of frozen amazement Starfleet training took over, and she called Mr Scott and Dr M'Benga to Sickbay as a matter of urgency.

The dour Scotsman, who had been close by, appeared first, asking rather sharply what all the fuss was about. That was, until his eyes lighted on Spock's prone form on the examination table, above which diagnostic lights demonstrated visibly that all was not well with their First Officer.

Scott immediately went on the offensive. "What have they done to ye, laddie? Show me where they've taken the Captain and Dr

McCoy, and we'll gi' them a demonstration of what a Starship can do!"

It took three attempts for Spock's quiet "Mr Scott" to break through the Engineer's outburst, when he calmed down enough to say, "Aye, Mr Spock?"

The Vulcan's mind was still functioning, although more slowly than usual. He had gained a great deal of information from the Engineer's outburst. Now he asked, "How long is it since I disappeared from the Enterprise?"

Scott answered, "'Tis only three or four minutes, and already they've tortured ye..."

"Mr. Scott," croaked the Vulcan, whose voice was growing weaker by the minute.

He was helped by Dr M'Benga, who had entered Sickbay in time to hear the end of the conversation. He took in the panel readings, the shivering Vulcan - now encased in a thermal covering provided by Nurse Chapel, but nonetheless visibly frozen - and the angry Engineer. Immediately he prepared an injection. Spock saw the movement and halted M'Benga with one of his famous looks.

The Doctor immediately realised that Spock had something important on his mind, and also realised that Scott was ranting on oblivious of this. He shouted, "Mr. Scott, please listen!" and was rewarded with complete silence, into which he said quietly, "I believe that Mr Spock has something to say, and since I intend to put him under as soon as he's said his piece, I'd be grateful if you would all be quiet for a few minutes."

Spock's eyes thanked the Doctor as he started to speak. "Mr. Scott, no-one has been injured or tortured."

M'Benga prevented another boisterous explosion from Scott with an upraised hand.

Spock continued, "Under no circumstances are you to take hostile action against the planet unless the Enterprise herself is attacked. That is a direct order. If my hypothesis is correct, there are no living beings on the planet, and the computers are attempting to comply with our wishes as well as their programming permits. Unfortunately they were not programmed for Human beings, and they doubtless find the illogic of your species a problem to interpret. If I am correct, it is their misinterpretation of Dr McCoy's wishes that led to their not allowing for the effects of cold on my person. I believe that they have now corrected their error."

The speech exhausted Spock, but it was imperative that Scott understand that they were not under attack, and had not been tortured, but had quite possibly been assisted.

Scott asked, "Ye mean computers did this to ye, and 'tis all an accident? They're actually trying to help Dr McCoy?"

Spock nodded. "I believe that is what I said, Mr. Scott," came the reply, but Spock was unable to maintain his nonchalance. With an effort he added, "If I am correct, when I have recovered I will be transported back to Earth to complete Dr McCoy's wishes. While I am gone I suggest that you deploy Mr Chang to study the computers

more closely - but ensure that he touches nothing."

Scott was not happy. "What do ye mean, returned to Earth, and how do I know ye won't be in danger if ye go back?" he asked.

Spock replied, "Nothing is certain, Mr. Scott, but I believe..."

M'Benga cut him off. "I'm sorry, gentlemen, but time has run out." So saying he injected the Vulcan with a combination of drugs to raise his body temperature, ease his almost non-existent heartbeat and with it his blood circulation, and above all put him to sleep to allow his body to recover from the hypothermia from which he was most definitely suffering.

Weakened as he was, Spock succumbed almost immediately, and M'Benga was alarmed by the speed with which he lost consciousness. He ordered Nurse Chapel to stay with the Vulcan, and went to study some tapes on Vulcan physiology. Scott returned to the bridge.

Mr. Scott decided it just wasn't his day when Nurse Chapel contacted him to say that Spock had disappeared before her eyes. Even with Spock's prediction, it was a cause for concern. Only her final sentence, "But the diagnostic panel showed that his body temperature had risen to normal," gave Scott hope. He had to honour the Vulcan's orders, but he knew it would be hard just waiting until he heard from the Captain, First Officer and Doctor. He held on to the fact that Spock was a logical man, and his hunches were always reliable.

The remainder of the bridge crew, who had been advised of Spock's hypothesis and were now informed of his second disappearance, took one look at the grim Scotsman sitting in the Captain's chair and busied themselves elsewhere.

Scott felt the loneliness of command, and wished he was back with his engines in a world he understood. Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock could keep their precious bridge and their command - if they ever returned to it.

When Spock materialised back in the aircar after what had been only a few minutes for Kirk and McCoy, he gave the two of them a shock. He had not had time to acquaint either of them with his theories before he had been transported back to the Enterprise, and they still believed themselves to be in the hands of a dangerous alien race.

McCoy quickly took Spock's pulse and checked under his eyelids. Without medical equipment there was little else he could do. Kirk looked on helplessly, his face creased up in a tight frown.

McCoy finally announced, "Well, he'll live, Jim, but I don't know what they've done to him. They've used drugs of some kind. He's out cold. I won't be able to tell if there are any side effects until he comes round. The good thing is that his body temperature is back up to normal. They obviously didn't want him to die - not yet, anyway. But it has to be something pretty strong to react so quickly." McCoy didn't know that in reality Spock had been away for over an hour.

Kirk's mixture of relief and fear made his voice rasp as he asked, "Why Spock? And why the drugs, if they've already read his mind? He told us they knew everything he knew. What more could they possibly want? Why didn't they take me? I'm the Captain. I'm responsible for him, for you, for all of us."

McCoy squashed his own fears as he sought to reassure Kirk. "I don't know what they've used on him, Jim. It might be no more than a powerful tranquilliser. Or it could be a truth drug - something to make him more compliant - or it could be almost anything. Maybe he was more successful at shielding his thoughts from them than he believed, or maybe they wanted to compensate for his reaction to the cold. As Spock would say, there's not enough data on which to base a hypothesis. I'm sorry, Jim - we'll just have to wait."

With that Kirk had to be content. He tucked the corners of the blanket more tightly around the Vulcan and cradled Spock's head on his lap. In a quiet voice he said, "He looks so relaxed in sleep, Bones, and so... vulnerable."

McCoy swallowed hard before replying. "I know, Jim. At least he's warmed up. All we can do is make him comfortable, and wait." So saying McCoy leaned over and smoothed the Vulcan's ruffled fringe, an action he would never have taken had Spock been conscious.

Kirk looked at him and said gently, "Bones, you're as much of a fraud as he is."

McCoy started guiltily, and then made a face. They both knew that Kirk was right.

The journey down the mountain seemed interminable, yet Spock had not come round when the aircar came to a halt. Kirk and McCoy only had time to register that they had stopped when Phil opened the door and said cheerfully,

"We're here, folks." He then took in their grim faces and added, "How's the Vulcan? We'd better get him inside pronto."

McCoy replied, "He's unconscious." There didn't seem much point in adding to Phil's burdens by saying he'd been drugged. Besides, McCoy wasn't sure if Phil was real, part of an illusion created by the aliens, or one of the aliens in Human form. He decided to keep his own counsel until he was sure.

Phil, more used to an ebullient McCoy, frowned. "It's that bad, huh, Doc?" As he spoke he moved to pick Spock up.

Kirk beat him to it by a mile. "I'll manage, thanks," he said, pushing his own body between Phil and Spock as a barrier.

Phil took the hint. "Bring your friend this way," he said, appreciating that only friendship could lead to such possessiveness.

Kirk followed him silently into the house.

McCoy followed in their wake, and stopped dead inside the front door. In spite of his distrust of Phil and his concern for Spock, one look at the inside of this cabin caught at his breath. It was beautiful - just as he remembered it. The thick logs interlinked to form the walls, the enormous fireplace with a cheerful fire built up and burning brightly, gave light, heat and an aura of peace. McCoy

had to remind himself that it might not be real.

When Anne came through the door from the back bedroom McCoy's "Anne!" was torn from him without thinking, despite his disbelief. She looked exactly as he remembered her. Only his memories of Nancy Crater enabled him to keep things in perspective. His belief that the salt creature was Nancy had been total, and deep-seated. He would not be so easily led astray a second time.

Anne took one look at him, threw her hands in the air and rushed over to give him a massive hug that took his breath away. He returned it, but not in full measure.

She stood back and looked at him, her frank blue eyes meeting his own deep-seeing gaze. "What's wrong?" she asked, sensing his hesitation.

Not wishing to explain his real fears he turned to where Spock lay and said, more lightly than he felt, "I'm worried about my friend, Spock. He's a Vulcan, and he seems to be suffering from the cold here."

She looked over to where Kirk and Phil stood hunched over the Vulcan, who had been laid on the settee and covered with blankets.

"What on earth were you doing out in such weather, and without any protective clothing?" she asked, looking him up and down in some surprise. "And why didn't you tell us you were coming? If we'd known we would have put out the banners for you." Then she leaned over and kissed him lightly on the cheek, adding, "But I'm glad you came and brought your friends. This will make it a proper Christmas for us all. It's been so long, Len. Starfleet has kept you away from us."

McCoy was surprised by her words - he had not expected her to know so much. Perhaps Spock had told her. Then he remembered that Spock would not have known she called him Len. Perhaps he had told the aliens that himself. That bothered him, too.

He was brought from his reverie by the Captain's call. "Bones, I think he's coming round. You'd better have a look at him."

McCoy approached the settee and watched as Spock's form wriggled slightly under the blanket. There was no thrashing about, and McCoy knew he had not been in trance. As he watched the Vulcan's body became still, then his eyes opened. For a moment the brown eyes remained unfocused, then Spock blinked and took in first McCoy, then the other faces ranged around him.

"Fascinating," was the first word he said.

McCoy was relieved. The Vulcan seemed perfectly sane and had obviously recognised them. To hide his feelings he said rather gruffly, "Is that the only word you know, Spock? A visit to the aliens doesn't seem to have improved your repertoire any." Then he swore, suddenly realising he had said too much. He should not have mentioned aliens with Anne and Phil around.

Spock's left eyebrow rose in response, but before he could make a verbal reply Anne put her hand to her mouth in a gesture of fear and said,

"What aliens, Len? Did something happen to you on your way

here? Is that why you're still in uniform? Will they come here and attack us? What do they want?"

Spock, only just recovered from the effects of a potent tranquilliser, found it impossible to follow this series of questions, but he was determined to dispel the idea of aliens and to put his friends' minds at rest. "Your pardon, madam," he began, "I regret I found it impossible to follow all your questions. However, if I may answer the first one, there are no aliens."

He didn't get to finish. Kirk and McCoy together chimed in, "No aliens!?!"

"That is correct," Spock said calmly. Then, as the Humans all continued to stare at him he proceeded to expound his theory that the computers had transported them to Earth to allow McCoy to fulfil his wish for a Christmas here in Virginia.

With a lot of questions thrown in he added the information that the computers were, he believed, meant as a leisure complex left by an advanced race of beings. They had read McCoy's wish to spend Christmas on Earth, and had transported them all back to make it possible. To the embarrassment of Kirk, and particularly McCoy, he went on to say that he believed the Humans to be real and not figments of their imaginations. The reason things had not gone smoothly was that the computers were programmed for different, more logical minds, and had not expected the people using them to do so without being fully prepared for transportation. However, when they had sensed the danger to Spock they had acted by returning him to the ship, where he had been treated by M'Benga before being returned to play his part in McCoy's experiences.

"You mean all this is because of me?" asked McCoy, for once too surprised to say anything sarcastic.

"Affirmative," replied the Vulcan. "I believe we are all here to enable you to experience whatever you were wishing for when you accidentally operated the computer."

"Well I'll be!" said McCoy with something like satisfaction. Then he added, "Anne, Phil, I'm so sorry. I've been so sure you were a figment of my imagination and somehow connected with the aliens that I've not been fair on you."

To Spock's amazement apologies were given and accepted and passed from Human to Human at such speed that he found it hard to believe they actually meant anything at all. Finding it all more than his dazed mind could cope with, he attempted to get to his feet. McCoy forestalled him by gently pressing him back down onto the couch.

"Not so fast, my Vulcan friend," he said. A glint of amusement appeared in his eye. "If this is all for my benefit, then let's do things properly. When we were on that planet I was wishing for a real old-fashioned Christmas, just like the ones I used to spend here with Anne and Phil, but with the added bonus of sharing it with one Starship Captain and one pointed-eared, stubborn Vulcan who refuses point-blank to celebrate Christmas." Then to the Vulcan's surprise tears appeared in the Doctor's eyes and he added without his usual parry and thrust, "Just for once, Spock, make my wish come true. Try and enjoy Christmas."

Spock just nodded his acquiescence, reading the sincerity of

the Doctor's words and filled with an emotion he firmly squashed before even trying to identify it.

Jim Kirk was not so easily satisfied. "What about the ship?" he asked.

Spock advised that he believed that no matter how long they spent on Earth they would be returned within minutes of their original departure time, as had happened when he had been returned to the ship for medical treatment.

"If you wish, Captain, I believe the Doctor could have you returned to the ship to make sure of this just by thinking his concern, as I believe he is still being monitored by the computers. That is why I was returned to the ship for treatment when he became worried about me."

McCoy tried it, but nothing happened.

Spock watched, then commented, "I believe the Doctor is not genuinely concerned, Captain, and that is why his attempt has not worked. Your own anxiety is not being monitored by the computers."

Spock reassured the Captain by advising that he was 98.2% sure of his hypothesis. He did not add that what worried him was the possibility that the Enterprise would not understand the situation, and that Mr Scott might take precipitous action in their absence. Kirk was worried enough without that.

However the Captain, forced to admit that there was nothing they could do about their current situation, finally accepted it and decided to do his best to enjoy himself.

They only had one week to go to Christmas Day itself. It was decided that they would all - except Spock, who was confined to bed by the Doctor - go out and gather in wood for the log fire, and choose a Christmas tree.

So it was that some hours later Spock woke up from his enforced rest hearing the return of the Humans. They were all laughing and joking, and all appeared rather wet. Kirk explained the Human custom of throwing snowballs, which got a raised eyebrow in response. They had collected plenty of wood, and chosen an eight foot high tree.

Spock looked at the cabin. "I do not believe such a tree will fit in here, Captain."

Kirk smiled at him affectionately. "You have a lot to learn about Christmas, Mr Spock. You always choose a tree bigger than you need so that you can trim the top and allow it to grow back. We cut it down to height today, so when we go back on Christmas Eve it will have grown up enough to cover the signs of our cutting it. That way, when we trim it down it will have just a perfect outline."

"What constitutes perfection in the outline of a Christmas tree?"

It was McCoy, exasperated, who answered. "Spock, this is not a scientific expedition. A perfect tree is one that has the right shape. A fir tree shape."

"Then there is no logic in trimming it, Doctor, since it will already *be* fir tree shaped."

"Spock," threatened McCoy, "if you can't say anything useful, just say nothing."

The Vulcan retreated into silence immediately, believing himself to have offended yet another Human custom.

It was Phil who eased the sudden tension. "It's all a matter of opinion, Mr Spock. What seems perfect to one person would be the wrong tree for someone else. You have to choose a tree you like and trim it to the shape that suits you. The trees are rather thin on top, and that's why we trim them and let them grow up a bit, so that they are thicker in appearance and better able to take all the decoration. Have you seen a Christmas tree before?"

"Indeed. Every Christmas since my birth."

"I didn't think Vulcan celebrated Christmas?"

"Not precisely, although we do have a celebration I would translate as 'The Time of Renewal'. However, my mother was Human, and always had a Christmas tree, though a much smaller one than the one used on the Enterprise."

McCoy raised an eyebrow at that. "Was that logical?"

"It is only logical for a Human to be allowed to celebrate a Human festival of such significance, Doctor."

"Then you must have sung 'Jingle Bells', and kissed under the mistletoe, and..." McCoy's voice tailed off in the face of the stone-walling Spock gave him.

"No."

"No? Then what did you celebrate?"

"Forgive me if I am wrong, Doctor, but I understood that Christmas was a celebration of the birth of Christ. Is that not so?"

"Of course it is!"

"Then I fail to see the logic of singing 'Jingle Bells' or kissing under mistletoe."

"It's all part of the Christmas spirit."

"I fail to see the logic of imbibing at Christmas, either."

Kirk burst out laughing, then added gently, "He doesn't mean that kind of spirit this time, Spock. He means the spirit of Christmas, the feeling of goodwill towards men. *All* men," he added meaningly.

McCoy looked ashamed for a moment, then he nodded. "That's it, Spock. Being nice to everyone - if you could manage that for a day - giving people presents, singing carols, sharing a time of peace together. It's all part of Christmas."

"I understand the principle, Doctor."

"It's not a matter of understanding, Spock. It's a matter of feeling it. Of living it. You don't understand that, do you? In fact, you can't feel it, can you?"

"You're not being fair," said Kirk, coming to Spock's defence.

"The Doctor is correct, Captain. I do not feel Christmas as you do. But there are certain parts of the celebration I understand and can respond to."

"Like giving presents?" grinned Kirk, suddenly remembering his last Christmas present from Spock.

Spock shook his head. "That is just an outward sign, Captain. The real understanding comes from the Bible."

"And you believe it?" asked McCoy scornfully.

"My beliefs are not a matter for discussion, Doctor. However, the spirit of Christmas is explained there, is it not?"

"Well, yes."

"Then if I understand correctly, Christmas is about the birth of Christ. The celebration of the fact that man was saved from his own sin by a baby, born the Son of God, yet born to a Human mother in a stable. Is not the point of the story the fact that God reconciled man to himself through the life and death of that child, and the giving of gifts and the sharing of Christmas itself follows the giving of gifts by the Wise Men, and the joy shared by the Shepherds?"

McCoy was silenced. He hadn't expected Spock to understand all of that. In fact he was surprised that the Vulcan had even read the Bible, although he guessed he shouldn't be since Spock was very well read in all the classics.

Kirk too was silent, for a different reason. It had only just dawned on him that Spock was much nearer to the true celebration of Christmas than he himself had ever been - at least since he had been a child back on Earth, when his mother had taken him to church and he had sung in the choir. Christmas on the Enterprise included a church service, which he realised now was always attended by the Vulcan, but it included far more of the boisterous goings-on like parties and kissing under the mistletoe.

Spock thought he had offended again. "Forgive me. I did not mean to misconstrue your conception of Christmas, nor to demean it. As a Vulcan I should not have spoken about something I do not fully understand."

McCoy cleared his throat. "Spock, it's me who should say sorry. You reminded me what Christmas is really all about. Sometimes we tend to take the real Christmas for granted, tucked away inside all the celebrating and imbibing." He grinned sheepishly. "Even the tree is only supposed to remind us of that."

"Yes," added Kirk. "Like all the candles, too - a reminder that God came as a light to the world." That was something he hadn't remembered since his childhood, either. "You know, Spock, sometimes it takes someone looking at things objectively to make you realise just how far you've strayed from what you set out to achieve. I think we'll make this a *real* Christmas celebration."

"Would anyone like a mince pie?" asked Anne, breaking the serious mood of the discussion.

"Mmm... yes, please," said McCoy courteously.

"I think I'll take two, for luck," Kirk added, getting a meaningful look from the Doctor that concentrated on his stomach.

"I do not eat meat," said Spock formally.

Anne laughed. "It's not meat, Mr Spock. It's mincemeat."

"I do not eat meat, minced or otherwise," replied the Vulcan.

That set everyone laughing. It took Anne quite a while to recover sufficiently to explain that this 'mincemeat' was made with raisins and sultanas, and had no meat in it whatsoever - she had even used a vegetarian suet.

"A highly illogical name," was the only comment Spock would make. He was, however, tempted to try one, and although he didn't have a second he did finish the one he took, which meant that he had not disliked it.

The week passed very quickly indeed, too quickly for both the Doctor and the Captain. It was so relaxing to be there, to just enjoy the easy atmosphere, the simple lifestyle, the feel of the wind blowing down the valley, the pleasure from a simple task like chopping wood or coaxing kindling to flame. The Vulcan joined in as far as possible, bearing in mind the fact that he had to wrap up in several layers of jumpers, scarves and gloves before McCoy would let him out into the cold, crisp mountain air.

They settled into the routine easily: days in and out, doing the everyday tasks; evenings together around the fire, sharing reminiscences and hot chocolate and cookies - and for the Humans a very civilised sherry or port.

Christmas Eve arrived before they were really prepared. Jim Kirk smiled the smile of a small boy as he woke at 5.00 a.m. and found himself unable to return to sleep. He decided to creep out to the kitchen and make himself a cup of tea.

He had just put the kettle on when he sensed he was not alone. He turned to find Spock regarding him with a raised eyebrow as he stood there in his borrowed pyjamas and dressing gown. Then he realised what had caught the Vulcan's attention; it was the 'pixie' slippers he had borrowed.

Kirk grinned at the silent figure. "I guess you don't get slippers like these on Vulcan. They'd not be all that practical in the heat."

Spock didn't deign to answer. Kirk sighed and offered him a cup of tea, which was accepted. They stood together in amicable silence, looking out onto the picture-postcard scene which lay before the cabin. Words were unnecessary between them. They shared the moment of peace together, and that was sufficient.

They were on their second cup of tea when there was a bump, a "Yeow!" and then some unprintable swear words, before the Doctor

appeared. Kirk burst out laughing as soon as he entered. McCoy looked at Spock, but the latter indicated that he was not a party to the joke.

"Okay, Jim, let's have it. What's so funny?" asked the Doctor.

Kirk was too creased up to reply. In fact, Spock had to rescue his tea before it ended up on the kitchen floor.

After several minutes McCoy joined in with the laughter. Spock raised an eyebrow.

"If you now understand the joke, Doctor, perhaps you could enlighten me."

McCoy howled even louder. When he finally managed to answer Spock was left none the wiser.

"I don't know what Jim's laughing at, but you've got to admit his laugh is infectious!"

With that the two of them were set off again. Spock looked on, totally unaffected. The infection, he rationalised, did not spread to Vulcans.

His reserve only seemed to fuel the flames of the Humans' laughter. It got so bad they began to pound each other on the back. Finally they recovered themselves enough to allow Spock to steer them into the lounge, where he gave each of them a cup of tea and then seated himself.

That was the tableau that met Anne and Phil; two Humans, still in their nightwear, and one Vulcan, fully dressed against the cold, all sitting sipping tea. The Humans were both grinning from ear to ear. The Vulcan - well, he was just a Vulcan.

Anne asked them what they found funny, and Kirk claimed that Spock was the cause of the trouble.

The Vulcan was astounded. "I assure you, I was not a party to the joke, madam," he said politely.

"Not party to it, Spock? You started it!"

Spock remained silent. He did not follow Kirk's reasoning.

When Kirk had recovered himself sufficiently from a second bout of the giggles he explained that Spock had laughed at his slippers, and when he'd seen McCoy in *his* slippers he'd just had to laugh.

"I assure you, I did not laugh at your slippers, Captain. I merely showed some scientific interest in an item of clothing that was unfamiliar to me."

That got all of them laughing.

Eventually they managed to sort themselves out, have a good breakfast and set off to collect the tree. Even Spock had been allowed out by McCoy, under the Doctor's orders to wrap up warmly.

The tree, when they relocated it, had grown back nicely. The foliage was now long enough to cover the cut they'd made a week before. Spock's help was invaluable in digging the tree up. They'd

never had Vulcan muscle engaged on such a task before, and found themselves heading back to the cabin a lot earlier than they had expected.

However, things did not go smoothly. They were only part of the way back when the Vulcan suddenly put up a hand for silence. Kirk and McCoy, used to his ways, stopped immediately, without thinking. Phil and Anne walked on until Kirk stopped them with a finger to his lips in the ancient gesture requesting silence.

They waited for a few moments, then Spock finally spoke. "Someone is calling for help, Captain. In that direction."

Spock pointed along a disused path, and they all followed him along it. After about ten minutes they came upon a scene of devastation. A convoy of sleds, obviously carrying stocks of some kind, had been caught in an avalanche. Both Humans and horses had been trapped. Some were close to the surface, and were just beginning to extricate themselves from under a layer of snow, but it was obvious from the upturned runner of at least one sled that more people were buried beneath the snow.

Within seconds the Enterprise party, together with Anne and Phil, had started digging in the snow. Kirk stopped long enough to organise things. He sent Anne back to the cabin to bring the aircar with medical supplies, plus axes and ropes, and told McCoy to prepare a first-aid station for the injured, informing him that supplies were on the way. Spock and Phil had already reached the first victim by the time Kirk returned to help them dig.

It was a difficult task. As they dug down towards the victims the soft snow would suddenly dislodge itself and fill up some of the hole they had made, slowing their progress. Spock stopped to listen every now and then, his sharp ears tuned to cries for help and the sound of laboured breathing. Before an hour was up they had rescued seven Humans, three horses and two dogs.

Half an hour later they had rescued every member of the sled party. Remarkably, no-one was seriously injured, the worst suffering being a bruise or two.

Spock was not surprised; it fitted his theory. He was certain of this when it was decided that those suffering minor injuries should return to the cabin with Anne and Phil in the aircar. That left the Enterprise trio on foot, but before too long they were offered a ride in one of the horse-drawn sleds.

By mutual agreement - and without any discussion whatsoever - Spock was offered the middle seat, firmly and warmly placed between Kirk and McCoy. He didn't object and McCoy, satisfied by this, grinned widely.

"You know, Spock, you really are making an effort to join in the Christmas spirit."

"Indeed," was the Vulcan's only response, but it was enough. It was a good thing that McCoy was not a mind reader; Spock was quite sure that the whole fiasco was for the Doctor's benefit, and that he could do little to spoil it if he wanted to - which he didn't.

They started back to the cabin. The sleigh moved easily on its runners, the single white horse in harness gliding effortlessly

across the soft unmarked snow as they followed their own path. The sound of bells jingling gently as each hoof impacted on the snow as the horse trotted on became a background rhythm, accepted by the mind in similar vein to the noises of the bridge machinery on the Enterprise.

Spock found himself falling asleep when McCoy suddenly began singing, "Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way..." Before long the driver and Kirk had joined in, and the Vulcan found himself wide awake again. They moved on to sing a whole host of Christmas songs and hymns, ending with 'I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas.'

McCoy met Spock's eyes and defended himself needlessly. "Us Humans like it, even if you don't, Spock."

The Vulcan raised an eyebrow. "I do not find the singing unpleasant, Doctor. It is merely the illogic of such words in the confines of a Starship that I find hard to understand."

They arrived in front of the cabin by the time they had finished their brief exchange.

Before long the sled party, confirming that they had fully recovered, wished everyone a happy Christmas and left to continue their journey. McCoy and Kirk watched sadly as the horses, dogs and Humans hit the trail, waving goodbye.

They weren't left to brood. Anne and Phil had made mugs of hot chocolate to cheer everyone up and warm up certain members of the party. Spock was grateful, if loath to admit it. He had been very, very cold, although in no danger. Then they had a snack lunch.

As soon as they had cleared away the lunch things Anne brought out the Christmas decorations and they started to decorate the cabin and the tree. Spock soon found himself surrounded by electrical wiring for the Christmas tree lights. He sighed silently when McCoy interrupted him to ask him to assist in placing the angel on top of the tree; it seemed to him that he had already been through that experience once this Christmas. However, bearing in mind that this visit was for the Doctor's benefit, he applied himself to the task without comment. McCoy was surprised that the Vulcan didn't object, and found himself less fussy over the placing of the angel than he had been back on the Enterprise, when he was sure Spock had not appreciated the task properly.

By evening the tree was fully decorated with everything from angel to candles. The room was adorned with streamers and tinsel, and the wall lights that Spock had managed to repair. The five of them settled down to a wonderful dinner, then followed that with coffee, and a liqueur for the Human members of the group.

Then Phil went out and started the aircar; they all piled in and set out for the nearby village, where they joined the locals heading towards the church. The midnight service was well attended, and they all joined in the singing of hymns and carols, and the exchange of greetings of peace. McCoy was again surprised by Spock's understanding as the Vulcan compared the 'Peace be with you' offered to those around with his own 'Live long and prosper'. For his part the Vulcan had been surprised to be included in the exchange. He had resisted the hand-shaking, but had returned the greetings. Only with Jim Kirk did he offer his hand in response - and then the exchange of greetings was matched with an exchange of thoughts as their minds touched. McCoy watched the smile light

Kirk's face, and was happy for his friends.

They returned to the cabin in the early hours of Christmas morning and retired straight to bed. However, that night each of them quietly, if not silently, left his own bed and tiptoed into the lounge to leave presents under the tree. Spock was intrigued to find that the orange, nuts and milk supposedly left for Father Christmas had been consumed by the time he made his way into the lounge. He did not believe in Father Christmas, but he was amused by the lengths the Humans went to to keep up the pretence, knowing from Jim that they did not believe the legend either. St. Nicholas was another matter.

The morning dawned bright and clear, but before long the snow started to fall in gentle flakes. Kirk was up first - again. He could hardly contain himself as he rushed out to the kitchen. Again Spock was close in his heels, almost as though he sensed when the Captain woke up and followed him. McCoy wasn't far behind. Then Anne and Phil joined them.

They had a light breakfast and then assembled under the tree. By agreement McCoy was nominated to sort out the presents and hand them to each individual. Before long there was only the sound of rustling paper as they opened the piles of presents before them. The Enterprise men had not had time to go shopping, and each had made presents from the items available in and around the cabin. These proved to be even more special than any present that could be bought.

This was McCoy's special Christmas. He was absolutely delighted with his presents. Jim had given him a wood carving of the Enterprise. It was not perfect in shape, but he could tell it was meant to be the ship. It was Jim's way of saying he was part of his family.

Spock also surprised him. The Vulcan gave him a scroll with the words of 'White Christmas' carefully written out in Spock's own hand. His work would match the best of Earth's calligraphy artists, and Spock had even illustrated it with a Vulcan-style drawing of the three of them in the sled.

Thus it was with some surprise that McCoy found himself back on the Enterprise.

Kyle was staring at the three of them, but concentrating on the Doctor. "Is anything the matter, Dr McCoy?" he asked.

McCoy, suddenly aware of the moisture threatening to overrun his eyes, wiped at them savagely with his sleeve and glared at the Transporter Chief, daring him to see anything the matter. Kyle took the hint.

"Status, Mr Kyle?" Kirk asked crisply.

"As per Mr Spock's orders we are orbiting the planet and have sent down experts to examine the computers. Nothing has been discovered yet. We didn't expect you back this soon, Captain."

Kirk raised an eyebrow of his own. "Just how soon is it, Mr Kyle?"

The Englishman looked over at Spock, consulted the ship's chronometer and replied, "Exactly 8.5 minutes, Captain."

"Impossible!" said McCoy.

"I don't know," said Kirk. "What do you think, Spock?"

The Vulcan was ready for the question. "That is less time than I would have allowed, based on my previous return to the Enterprise, but it does fit the known facts."

Kirk grinned. "Well, we'll worry about that later. First, let's beam our people back on board."

"Captain," Spock broke in, "are we not going to continue our investigation?"

"No, Mr Spock. I think we'll leave this anomaly to Federation researchers, probably historians."

"I do not believe historians would be appropriate, Captain. It is my belief that computer experts would be better placed to understand the phenomenon."

"But historians would enjoy visiting the past, as we did."

"I do not believe we visited the past, Captain."

"Well, Anne and Phil sure aren't here now," added the Doctor, joining in the debate.

"No, Doctor. They were never there, now or then."

"Explain," said the Captain.

"I cannot, Captain. The computers are beyond anything in Federation technology. It is my belief that they read the Doctor's wishes, provided the companions he requested, and allowed him to live out his fantasy."

"Like the amusement planet?" queried McCoy.

"But I thought you said they were real?" added Kirk.

"No, not like the amusement planet. We were transported somewhere. What we experienced was real in that it actually happened to us. Had I not been returned to the ship I would have died of hypothermia. That is a fact. However, the idea of time travel does not fit the facts. We returned here after only 8.5 minutes of our time, yet we experienced a Christmas that is not from the good Doctor's past, else he would have remembered it, and we ourselves would have memories of sharing it. I do not believe it will be from our future, either, since it is likely we will be spending this Christmas on the Enterprise. I can only speculate that what we experienced, although having a physical reality, was something lived out in our own minds."

"Are you suggesting that the computers were built by a race like the Melkotians, Spock?" queried McCoy.

"A possibility, Doctor."

Just then the landing party returned to the transporter

platform, and the discussion was interrupted by a lot of Human back slapping and good wishes.

Kirk led the way back to the bridge, closely followed by Spock and McCoy. Scott vacated the command chair with obvious delight, muttering about returning to his engines.

"Lt Uhura, I hope you have logged all this for the records," commented Kirk, making it something between a question and a statement. She nodded.

"Mr Chekov, if you have recorded the exact location of the planet, I think we can prepare to leave orbit." The Navigator nodded his confirmation.

"Ahead, warp factor one, Mr Sulu," finished Kirk.

The Enterprise moved out into space, resuming her previous course. The Vulcan and the Doctor took up their usual places behind the Captain's chair.

"You know, Jim," said McCoy quietly, "there's one thing I really like about all this."

"What's that?" asked the Captain amicably, knowing he was following where the Doctor was leading.

"The great thing is that we're back home in time to celebrate Christmas all over again!"

As though to emphasise the point Uhura patched in a call from Nurse Chapel to the Doctor requiring his presence in Sickbay. It was not related to any crew injuries or illness, but to problems with the supply of sherry for the Christmas Eve party.

Kirk grinned widely and said, "Sounds important, Bones. You'd better get to it right away."

The Doctor headed for the turbolift almost as quickly as Scott had done before him.

Kirk turned to the Vulcan, who had remained impassive behind him. "Everything okay, Spock?" he asked.

The Vulcan, his highly sensitive ears still assaulted by the sounds of Bing Crosby coming over Uhura's communications system, replied carefully, "I was just wondering if I chose the right present for Dr McCoy."

"Oh?" queried Kirk.

Spock moved over to Uhura's station, and gaining her permission with a raised eyebrow on his part and a smile on hers, operated the board to turn up the volume. The bridge was filled with the sound of 'White Christmas'. There was a crooning, quiet voice, obviously that of Mr Crosby, followed not too closely by a Southern drawl, unmistakably that of Dr McCoy.

"Yes, Captain. It is most fortuitous that I will have an opportunity to correct my error in a few days time. What the Doctor needs is not, as I first supposed, a copy of the words of his favourite Christmas song. He is in far greater need of singing lessons."

No-one disagreed with the Vulcan on that. However, it was Uhura who had the final word.

"That's just fine, Mr Spock, as long as you're not thinking of me as his instructor."

CHRISTMAS FAR FROM HOME

Here we are,
Far away from our homes,
Out amongst the stars
Deep in space.

We enjoy our work;
Exploring new planets,
Meeting new peoples;
Learning about them,
And teaching them about us.

Even out here amongst the stars
So far away from home,
We still like to celebrate certain events in the year -
Like Christmas.

We have a real tree
Which we keep in storage until we need it.
Just before Christmas we take it out,
And decorate it.

Cards are written and sent
To family, friends and crewmates.
Presents are carefully wrapped and labelled,
And placed beneath the tree.

Come Christmas morning,
Like children we gather,
To eagerly unwrap our presents
And to sing Christmas carols around the tree.

We also have a traditional Christmas dinner -
Adapted to suit every taste;
And to end the day some people play games
While others sit back and watch.

We are far from our homes,
Amongst the stars;
But our traditions we like to keep
And this is how we celebrate,
Out here in the depths of space,
Christmas on the Enterprise.

Christine Jones

THE HOGMANAY TEASE

by

Joyce Devlin

Life on a starship is never dull, especially on the one reputed to be the best in the fleet. Well, that may be because we have the best crew in the galaxy - and I don't forget myself, Chief Medical Officer Leonard McCoy, at your service. The Enterprise is an extremely demanding lady, and as far as Jim Kirk, our Captain, is concerned, she can give any other female a run for her money. I can tell you a few stories about that, but then again, maybe better not...

Honestly, being Chief Medical Officer you'd think I'd be shown some respect, but no. It shouldn't happen to a Doctor, but it always does.

This time it was Scotty moaning my ear off. Well, I couldn't really blame him - it was New Year's Eve, and we were in the Vulcan Space Dock. You can imagine what Scotty was moaning about, him being a true Scot.

It was my own fault. "What's up, 'laddie'?" I'd asked when I saw him, and that started him off.

"What's up? Dae ye need tae ask? It's Hogmanay and not a drink in sight, that's what's up."

"Missing one New Year won't hurt you," I replied.

"No, maybe not, but it's the thought of spending a dry Hogmanay and New Year's Day on Vulcan of all places that's killing me. Bones, never in my entire life have I spent a dry Hogmanay," he mourned.

"Believe me, I do know how you feel. But not to worry, it's only Jim and Spock who have to go down. Once they've beamed down one drink won't hurt."

"But Bones, how can I have a wee dram? I'm in charge."

"Just one won't hurt," I repeated.

"But on Hogmanay one'll lead to two, then three, four, five, and so on."

"So?"

"So the point is, I don't want to be court martialled."

"Court martialled, Scotty? What on earth for?" As you can see, I was asking for it.

"Being drunk in charge of a Starship, that's what for."

I nearly fell off my seat when Scotty came away with that

line. "Don't be daft, who'll know? We're in space dock," I replied. "Anyway, there's no such charge," I added when it had finally sunk in what he had said.

"Come on, Bones - it'd be just like Security to beam aboard with a wee plastic bag jist tae breathalyse me. After all, this is Vulcan!"

"I'm beginning to think you've been at the whisky already, Scotty."

"I have not! I've been tempted tae break open my gallon bottle I got from home for Christmas, but ye can check the seal if ye like."

"No, it's all right, I believe you. I guess we'd better go and see Jim and Spock off."

With that we left Sickbay together and headed for the transporter room.

Jim and Spock were just going through the door as we arrived. "Got everything you need, Jim?" I asked as Scotty moved across to the controls.

"Everything, thanks," Jim replied as they took their places on the transporter pad.

"You'll be staying with Ambassador Sarek tonight?" Scotty asked.

"That's right, so if anything crops up you know where to reach me."

"Don't worry, Jim, we'll look after this demanding lady for you. That's right, isn't it, Scotty?" I asked, trying to keep the devilment out of my voice.

"That's right."

"So enjoy yourselves. Oh, one thing, Jim." I was teasing now.

"What's that?"

"Just don't get drunk. If you do, watch out for the Security boys and their little plastic bags that you blow into."

At that the transporter beam caught them and they shimmered away.

I could just imagine the conversation in the Vulcan transporter station.

"Little plastic bag? What on earth is he on about, Spock?"

"Captain, if you remember, back in the late 20th century the police forces had small plastic bags into which one blew to establish the amount of alcohol in one's system."

So it was that Scotty remained sober, as did all the rest of the crew, and a good job too, for no sooner had the clock struck

twelve than the bridge filled with a Starbase Security team, the commander holding a small plastic bag with a pipe protruding from it.

"Commander Scott, Dr McCoy, we have reason to believe you are both drunk in charge of a Starship. You are required to blow into this." He held up the bag for all to see.

I groaned. Scotty moaned.

"I told ye so, Bones. Okay, laddie, give it here. But ye've had a wasted journey - I've no' touched a drop."

"We'll see what the bag has to say, shall we?" the Commander replied.

At that point the turbolift doors opened and Jim Kirk stepped through; a grin covered his face from ear to ear.

"You set this whole thing up, didn't you?" I asked.

"Yep. Thought you'd like to be on the receiving end for once, Bones. Sorry, Scotty, but just for once I had to get back at Bones."

"Jim Kirk, I'll... I'll... I'll get you for this!"

Like I say, it shouldn't happen to a Doctor, but nine times out of ten it does. This time my teasing had backfired on me.

SANTA'S VISIT

'Twas Christmas Eve on the Enterprise,
And the crew were in for a big surprise.
For as Santa was passing on his sleigh,
He decided to drop in and make their day.

'Twas a wonderful, marvellous sight,
That the crew beheld that night.
For there was Santa, his reindeer too,
Complete with presents for the crew.

He handed the gifts to one and all,
Even the Vulcan, so straight and tall.
They gave him the traditional mince pies and wine,
And invited him to stay and dine.

"Alas," said Santa, "I cannot stay,
I've presents to deliver, so I must be away."
The crew were sad that he had to go,
But as he left he turned to say:
"I'll be back next year, Yo! ho! ho!"

ACCIDENT

by

Jean Sloan

Commander Montgomery Scott stared at the dilithium crystal chamber in disgust. Then he flicked the intercom.

"Spock here."

"Mr. Spock, we have a wee problem. The crystals are decomposing."

"How long, Mr. Scott?"

"Perhaps twenty-four hours, maybe less. 'Twas passing through that ion storm that did it."

"I will take steps to ensure that the crystals are replaced before the situation becomes acute. Please alert the Captain - he is in his quarters dealing with some routine administration. Spock out."

Mr. Scott shook his head in disbelief. "So the situation's not acute yet! I dinna ken - what does it take to get yon Vulcan worked up?"

Preluna B was not exactly the Mecca of the civilised universe. It was little more than a giant rock thrown out into space eons before. It had few features of any interest, except that it was a rich source of ores of many kinds. There was a vast mining complex and little else.

"I'll go down with Scotty and organise the purchase of some good-grade crystals," James T. Kirk told his First Officer. "It shouldn't take long."

"Very good, Captain. The miners have requested some medical items to top up their stocks. Dr. McCoy is preparing the packages. He will follow you down when he is prepared."

"S'long, Spock. See you later."

As his Captain disappeared into the turbolift, Spock of Vulcan raised an eyebrow. It was approximately three months since Kirk had taken command of the Enterprise, and Spock had still not accustomed himself to the Human's informality.

The Captain and Mr. Scott materialised seconds later at the hub of the complex which was laid out like a giant wheel. Arne Sakussem, the Chief Administrator, met them and motioned them into the bar.

"Have a drink, gentlemen. It's not often I get a chance to entertain," Sakussem smiled.

"If ye dinna mind, Mr. Sakussem, I'd rather be off selecting crystals. The Enterprise's crystal chamber is in a parlous condition."

"All right, Mr. Scott. I'll call our Head of Production to see to your needs."

He was as good as his word, and minutes later Montgomery Scott was off into the bowels of the complex.

Jim Kirk was just relaxing with a drink when he became aware of the transporter effect.

"This will be Dr. McCoy with your medical supplies, Arne." He waved at the Doctor through the door. "C'mon in, Bones - you're expected."

"Well, it's all right for some people, lazing and socialising. Us lesser mortals have work to do." He turned and addressed himself to Sakussem. "Your Chief Medical Officer said he would meet me. There's a case he wants me to look at."

At that moment a man in an unmistakeable medical uniform entered.

McCoy held out his hand. "Dr. Strong, I presume?"

"Yes, Dr. McCoy. I'm very glad you've arrived. I believe you have experience of..." His words were lost as the bar-room door hissed shut behind the pair.

Kirk looked rueful. "They're making me feel guilty. Perhaps we'd better talk payment."

Sakussem grinned. "You can have the crystals, Captain. I consider the medical supplies and your physician's expertise payment enough. Besides..."

His words were cut short by a deep rumbling sound. The ground began to quiver. Glasses fell off the bar and bottles smashed. A crack appeared in the wall, and suddenly plasiform masonry was tumbling all around.

"Meester Spock, something is happening on the planet."

"A little more precision, if you please, Mr. Chekov."

"Eet looks like an earth tremor, sir."

Spock crossed quickly to his science station and activated his sensors. "A tremor of some force. Ms. Uhura, raise the complex."

"Sir, I'm trying. There's nothing but static."

"Try the Captain directly, then."

"Yes, sir... No response, Mr. Spock. The Captain's communicator is dead."

On the last word Spock stood up abruptly, feeling an unaccustomed sense of anxiety. "I'm going down. Mr. Sulu..."

"Sir..." It was Uhura who spoke. "It's Dr. McCoy."

"Spock here, Doctor."

"Spock, you detected the shock waves? The whole hub of the complex has collapsed. Jim was in there."

Spock stiffened but did not pause. "Was Mr. Scott with him?"

"No, he's somewhere on the outer rim in the storage areas. That part of the complex is safe. Listen, Spock - we need rescue teams down here. As many men as you can..."

"Dr. McCoy, we cannot be sure that the tremors have ceased. Stand by while I complete further scanning. Spock out."

"Spock, wait! Jim's somewhere underneath..."

"Doctor, there is more than one life at stake here, as you well know. You are delaying me," the Vulcan said, anxiety sharpening his tone.

He completed his measurements then, satisfied that it was safe for the moment, set about organising rescue parties.

"Spock to Dr. McCoy."

"McCoy here."

"Where exactly are you, Doctor?"

"I'm with Scotty and some search groups. We are on the outer fringe of the damaged area."

"Right. Leave your communicator open. We'll beam straight to you."

As Spock materialised a few yards from Dr. McCoy he took in the extent of the damage. Essentially, they were facing a solid wall of rubble. It was only by a miracle that the outer wall of the complex had remained intact.

"Hello, Spock. The bar is under here. That's where Jim was when I saw him last. He was with Arne Sakussem, the manager of the complex. Scotty's got the plans of the area. He thinks it would be best to start tunnelling from the far side." McCoy spoke quickly, tense, unsure of his control.

Spock looked at him, shocked at how strongly his own feelings mirrored the Doctor's.

James T. Kirk opened his eyes to blackness. As memory returned he tried to assess the damage to his person. He felt no pain. He could move one arm and his head - slightly; he was lying on the other arm, his legs appeared to be trapped, and there was something above him. His hand detected what he thought might be a table lying

on its side and protecting him. He remembered Sakussem.

"Arne!" he called gently, but there was no reply.

In the distance he could hear a faint buzzing sound, but he had no way to distinguish it. He reached for his communicator, but it was not there. A tentative feeling around did not reveal its whereabouts. He felt his head go fuzzy, and lapsed into unconsciousness.

Five hours had elapsed since the tremor had shaken Preluna. Two digging teams were proceeding with infinite care, afraid of bringing down the precariously balanced masonry. Dr. McCoy hovered on the fringe of the activity, unable to contribute but reluctant to return to the ship. A faint life reading had been detected beneath the rubble, but it was impossible to guess to whom it belonged.

The Doctor watched the Vulcan, who was directing the team nearest to him. Spock paused in his work and took a sensor reading for the sixth time in an hour. The Doctor went over to him.

"Concerned, Spock?"

Spock looked up, but paused before replying. "If the life form ceases to function it becomes pointless to work so slowly, Doctor."

"Why, you cold-blooded son-of-a-bitch!"

"Dr. McCoy, a female canine had no part in my creation. You are distracting me from my work"

Despite himself, Spock felt irritated, but irritation was irrational; his reaction to the Doctor was not logical. As he worked he tried to analyse the feeling. The truth was shocking. He had lied to McCoy. It was concern for the life form which made him check and re-check the reading; his annoyance was with himself for being caught out in the failing. He analysed further, and found that he hoped it was the Captain whose life readings were registering so faintly, and that he most assuredly did not want James T. Kirk to cease to exist. He looked up, feeling eyes upon him; it was McCoy, and with complete certainty he knew that the Doctor understood what was in his mind.

A shout from Scott's drilling team drew everyone's attention, and they made their way round to his position. The drill had broken through to reveal a cavern inside the rubble, constructed from fallen girders and broken tables.

Scott was peering into the hole and probing gently with a sensor rod. "I think she'll hold up - I'll just go in and explore."

"No, I will, Mr. Scott."

The commanding tone made Scott step aside, and Spock disappeared into the space.

Jim Kirk came to awareness once more. He wondered how much time had passed. He could feel something sticky on his face, and tasting it realised that it was blood. The buzzing sound he had

heard previously had grown louder; he tried to shout, but no sound came from his dry throat. Suddenly the buzzing reached a whirring crescendo, and he could hear voices; again he tried to shout, but only succeeded in producing a dry croak.

"Captain?" It was Spock's voice, and Kirk blessed his sharp Vulcan ears.

"Over here, Spock." To his own hearing his voice sounded little more than a whisper, but it was obviously sufficient. A light shone in his direction.

"Jim, how badly are you hurt?"

A little thrill of surprise ran through the Captain at the sound of his Christian name, the first time he had heard Spock use it.

"I don't know. I'm not in any pain, but there's blood on my face. My legs are trapped, too. They're numb, so they may be injured." He became aware that the beam of light was emanating from a hole in the rubble. "I'm in a sort of chamber constructed out of debris. Shine the light down, Spock - I'll try to make out what's pinning my legs... It looks like part of the bar counter. It's being held by one of the iron tables that they use around here. If the table gives, my legs have had it."

"Hold on, Captain. I'll enlarge this hole - it is safe to do so."

The light disappeared, then there was a scrabbling sound and some more masonry fell. He could hear Spock speaking to someone. A moment later the light reappeared.

"Spock, what about Arne Sakussem?"

"He is dead, Captain. There was only one life reading in here. I am coming through."

Seconds later he was looking up into the Vulcan's face, rendered other-worldly by the pale light he carried. He was, he found, trapped under a shelf made out of a beam, held by another beam across his legs.

Spock had more room to move. He examined the Captain's head gently. "Not too bad, Jim, but I had better not give you any medication." He turned his attention to Kirk's legs, placing two hydraulic lifters in such a position that the beam trapping the Captain could be raised a little.

"I cannot move this beam yet, until we are sure of the consequences. Hold on, Captain." Without further ado he disappeared into the hole.

It took over an hour to free Kirk. At last he was lifted out. His legs were no longer numb; though they were not broken he had suffered considerable lacerations, which were now giving him some pain. McCoy could not give him any painkillers because of the danger of concussion, and as they were moving him Kirk lapsed back into unconsciousness. They beamed back to the Enterprise, leaving Spock and Scott to continue rescue work.

Later that evening McCoy was sitting in his office catching up on paperwork, the inevitable result of dealing with any sort of accident. Arne Sakussem's body had been found; in total, twenty people had been killed.

The Doctor suddenly became aware that he was being watched. Spock was standing in the doorway, looking less than his normally immaculate self, obviously having arrived straight from the rescue operation.

"Doctor, how is the Captain?"

"Comfortable, Spock. He has a nasty concussion, but his legs are going to be fine. What about you - you look all in?" The Doctor's tone was kindly; he recognised Spock's concern for Jim Kirk, but did not comment.

"A shower and a change of clothing will cure me, thank you, Doctor. Is the Captain conscious?"

"If you mean can you see him, then yes, but he's asleep. I'm waking him at hourly intervals until I'm sure of the concussion. Why don't you go take your shower and get something to eat, then come back in about forty-five minutes. I'll be waking him then."

Spock moved off with alacrity. McCoy smiled at his retreating back.

Emotionless, eh? the Doctor thought to himself.

Two minutes before the appointed time Spock turned up in sickbay, now restored to his habitual tidiness. In point of fact Jim Kirk was already awake, and Spock could hear him complaining loudly that he was hungry. Suddenly embarrassed by his own concern he turned to leave, but was caught by McCoy coming out of his office.

"C'mon in, Spock - he's been asking for you. But mind, you're not to tire him out."

The strong voice of Kirk's complaints had lulled the Vulcan into a false sense of security, and he was quite unprepared for the pallor of the face on the pillow, or the lines of strain around the eyes. However, the eyes which rested on the Vulcan with a hint of a smile in their hazel depths were bright.

"Hullo, Spock. Have you brought me anything to eat?"

"No, Captain. I am sorry."

"Take no notice, Spock," chimed in McCoy. "I've told him he can't have anything yet." Then to Kirk, "Stop badgering your visitors, or they won't come back." As he turned to go the Doctor muttered quietly to the Vulcan, "Ten minutes only, Spock - he's not as well as he sounds."

Spock nodded, then turned to look at Kirk. "If I may say so, Captain, you're a very bad patient."

"Well, it makes McCoy's life interesting. How many lost their lives? Bones said he didn't know."

"Twenty in all. One serious injury in intensive care. None of the Enterprise crew was hurt except yourself."

Jim Kirk looked stricken, as Spock had known he would.

"I'm sorry, Captain."

"Why should you be sorry? You couldn't do anything."

"I always regret needless loss of life. And I am sorry that it hurts you to contemplate it."

Kirk was struck by the unmistakable sympathy in the voice. In response to it he spoke quietly, almost in a whisper.

"I thought no-one would find me, that I'd stay buried alive. I hate enclosed spaces."

On a sudden impulse of compassion Spock laid his hand on Kirk's arm. "We - I - would not have rested until you were found." Then, more quietly, "I was afraid that you had not survived. I find myself very glad that you did."

Kirk smiled up at Spock, then his eyes closed and he drifted off to sleep.

Spock stayed for a moment staring down at the still form of the man who had taught him how to feel. He pulled the blanket gently up over Kirk's shoulders, and left.

SHE

She who is my life,
She who is my wife.
She who calls
And my life stands still.

She who is my life,
She who is my world.
She who demands
My attention all.

She who is my life,
She lives in me.
My every breath
That silver bird
Called Enterprise.

Joyce Devlin

TO PAY THE PRICE

by

Elaine Sheard

The interplanetary conference on Starfleet's role in the Federation wound its way to a close. The main conference room, where Commissioner Morrison was conducting the last of the Fleet Officers' interviews, was less than half full. The Admirals and Captains had drawn much public interest; the Technical and Science Officers, however, were only for the most dedicated. Indeed, Commander Spock of the Enterprise was proving a difficult subject.

"So, Commander, you consider Starfleet vessels are commissioned for scientific exploration."

"No, sir. I consider their primary function is to give aid to the planets and peoples of the Federation, and thereafter to expand Federation knowledge whenever possible."

"Even if it is military aid, and you are a Vulcan?"

"If Vulcan is attacked we are required to defend ourselves and any others who might have need of our aid. Provided that the minimum amount of force is used, and the rites and customs of all are always considered, this is not against the Vulcan way."

"Yet Starfleet is a military force and you are a soldier who, if ordered to do so, will attack others."

"No, sir. I am a scientist who is also an upholder of Federation law."

"For a man of peace you have a very fancy uniform splashed with many awards for action taken against both Klingons and Romulans. They are not subject to Federation law. Might a less obviously military approach - favoured, I might say, by many of your compatriots - have served us better?"

"We defend the Federation against aggression. I do not wear these decorations for personal gratification, but to show that I have the necessary training and experience to defend the citizens and ideals of the Federation if necessary."

"Do you then agree with those who consider Starfleet too biased towards intervention?"

"No, sir. I consider that only a visible ability to defend the Federation keeps the peace."

"Fine words, Commander, but in practice this is not the case. In my experience - for instance, in my negotiations with the Klingons - the aggressive face of Starfleet has proved nothing but a hindrance."

"Your efforts do you credit, sir, but I consider that the existence of Starfleet can only be a help to any successful

conclusion."

That was where the proceedings ended, the honours, in Captain Kirk's opinion, going to his First Officer.

Dr. McCoy agreed, saying, "He should have known better than to argue with a Vulcan."

"I hope you'll remember that, Bones - although I doubt it."

"I don't argue, just discuss. Now if we're leaving here tomorrow I have some shopping to do."

"You'll have to be at the final reception tonight, Bones. Everybody will."

"I'll be there, then let's hope we can put dress uniform behind us for a while."

The reception was indeed crowded. Anyone who had any connection with the conference was there. This did not prevent Captain Kirk being spotted by Commissioner Morrison, who began by asking,

"You're returning to the Enterprise on Starbase 8 now that the refitting is complete?"

The result of the ensuing conversation was explained by Captain Kirk to his two colleagues next morning. Dr. McCoy was not slow to express his doubts.

"You mean we have to take Commissioner Morrison and his family with us when we rejoin the Enterprise? Have you met them, for heaven's sake?"

"Yes, I know. The son's a pain in the neck and the wife treats us like rather inferior servants, but it's only till we reach Starbase 8, then they'll join their Starliner for Earth. I can see the next few days are going to be wonderful. It's only a small craft - we're not travelling on a luxury liner. Spock here has already had one run-in with Commissioner Morrison."

This gained him no support from the Vulcan, however. "Commissioner Morrison was merely exercising the privileges of his rank by questioning me. If the engines of his transport are defective, it is our duty to offer an alternative."

"All right, but I bet there will be trouble before the trip is over."

When the passengers arrived Spock as the pilot, was checking the craft; it was therefore the Captain who welcomed them. The Doctor viewed their luggage with dismay, and spoke to the Morrison's teenage son.

"Sports equipment, cabin trunks... these shuttles are finely balanced. This lot must weigh a ton."

"Possibly, but I'm sure you will manage."

The youth then entered the craft, leaving the Doctor. McCoy turned to the driver of the luggage cart who said, grinning, "Each item's labelled, Doc, although I'm not supposed to help load."

The Doctor grunted, and using a well-tried method of persuasion left the driver to the task and went to find the others. It was nearly an hour later that the passengers and luggage were stored to Spock's satisfaction, and at last they could leave.

Living in close proximity broke the ice somewhat in the next few days, and Commissioner Morrison at least began to take an interest in their route.

"We pass near the Bagrell group of planets and asteroids which the Klingons are claiming, do we not, Captain?"

"Yes, sir, within 15,000 kilometres."

"I would like a closer look. They have been mentioned in my negotiations with the Klingons."

"What do you think, Spock?"

"It should present no problem, sir. This is an uninhabited area, although both Federation and non-Federation unmanned tracking stations are positioned on several planets."

The revised course was soon plotted and duly executed. That part of the proceedings went well, but disaster struck as the vessel was viewing one of the larger planets.

Spock's calm voice stated, "We are being fired upon, Captain, from H.4239 by what would seem to be a small laser cannon."

"Get us away from here."

"I am trying, Captain, but the engines are not responding well. Please see that everyone is strapped in. I may have to attempt a landing."

The ship rocked and heaved and the temperature rose alarmingly, but at last they reached the surface. The vessel, after crashing through undergrowth, came to a halt.

The Doctor was the first to speak. "That was some landing, but everyone seems to be in one piece. How is it for going outside? Does this place have an atmosphere?"

"Yes, Doctor. Indeed, there is a Federation observation facility here, although it is some 50 kilometers away over rough terrain."

There were more immediate concerns for the Captain. "You did well to get us down at all, Spock. Help the passengers outside, Doctor, while we examine the ship."

As the Doctor looked to the passengers the other two went to examine the rear of the vessel. What they found was not encouraging.

"You were right, Spock. Some sort of laser - half the back

plates are gone. It came from somewhere down here, didn't it?"

"About 20 kilometers to the east, sir. The observation station is in the opposite direction, but the shuttle cannot fly without extensive repairs. There is also the matter of the perpetrators."

"Yes, I know. The sooner we leave for the observation station the better. It is defensible. How difficult is it going to be to get there?"

"There is a trail through the hills which leads to a bridge erected by the survey team. It will give us few problems, but could prove hard for the civilians."

They rejoined the others, only to find more problems. The Doctor explained.

"Mrs. Morrison has a long-standing heart problem. It is normally controlled by medication, but strenuous exercise is most inadvisable."

The Commissioner was adamant. "My wife must not exert herself. You sent a message, didn't you? Well, we must wait here to be rescued."

Captain Kirk was blunt. "We cannot be sure it got through, but we do know that we were shot at, probably by someone from an illegal base on this planet. It could be pirates, or even Klingons. If so it could be diplomatically embarrassing. The last thing they will want is witnesses."

"That is just possible, but what about my wife?"

"We shall help her as much as possible. Almost anything is better than being captured by Klingons, believe me, Commissioner."

"Very well. There seems to be no alternative."

His son protested. "Father, you always say that the Klingons are a much-maligned people."

"Who knows what a renegade group might do? Your mother's well-being comes first. Kirk's right - we cannot take the risk."

"I never thought much to them, but you seemed to think they were wonderful."

"That was business. This is slightly different."

"So I see."

The Commissioner then went to speak to his wife while the others decided what to take with them. The Captain took his First Officer aside.

"Three phasers, even with three spare charges each, won't last long if it comes to a fight, but it's all we've got."

David Morrison was right behind him. "What about my bow? I won best of my group at the interplanetary sports with it."

"This isn't playtime. Take it with you by all means, as long as it doesn't stop you carrying your share of the supplies, and

helping your mother if necessary."

"All right, I get the message, but don't you see the bright side of anything?"

"Yes, but this isn't the time for it."

They set out soon after that. The small animal trail they were following soon began to rise and the going got harder. By nightfall, some three hours later, they were already half carrying the woman. The night was dark and very cold; Captain Kirk allowed no fire.

When the Doctor had settled his patient he took some food to the Captain. "Where's Spock?"

"He should be back shortly. His eyes are better than ours, and he's taking a look around."

"Even Spock needs some light."

He was interrupted by the sudden return of the Vulcan.

"Though we are a long way from this planetoid's star there is still some light, Doctor. How is Mrs. Morrison?"

"Not too good. She's sleeping, but I don't know about tomorrow."

"We cannot return to the shuttle. There are Klingons there already, and they are dressed in military uniform. Their utilisation of the things we left behind indicates a disregard for the law which does not bode well for us."

"You think they'll follow us?"

"Yes, Doctor, almost certainly. They must prevent us from reporting their presence."

The Doctor was silent while Captain Kirk asked, "How many did you see, Spock?"

"Ten, sir, although there could have been more inside the vessel."

"How long before they catch up to us at our present rate of progress?"

"About three hours, sir."

The Doctor might not have heard the exchange, asking, "How about a fire, Jim?"

"It can make no difference now, but keep it small."

The Doctor returned to the others, and after getting the fire going told them about the Klingons, but not how close they were.

David Morrison asked worriedly, "We're not going to reach the protection of the tracking station before they reach us, are we?"

"I'm sure if there's a way the Captain will think of it."

"Yes, but whatever it is, Commander Spock doesn't agree with it."

Though only a vague outline of the Starfleet officers could be seen, that much was obvious. The Doctor, however, for once made no comment, and when he joined them Captain Kirk was almost jovial.

Next morning after a cold breakfast the party prepared to leave. As David watched the Vulcan sort out the gear he approached the Doctor, saying, "He's staying behind, isn't he? That's what they were arguing about last night."

"That's right, son. I guess it wasn't that hard to figure it out. Someone with a phaser can hold the path for quite some time."

"But what happens when they run out of ammunition?"

"Oh, he'll be outflanked eventually, and that's why Jim got his way. Spock can't argue with logic; even Klingons wouldn't waste time with a Vulcan, but they'll probably not be able to resist trying to break a Starfleet Captain. That will give us time to get away."

"You mean Captain Kirk is the one staying behind?"

"Of course. Why else would they argue? They may be Starfleet officers, but they are also close friends."

The young man gave the two a long look, saying, "I think I begin to understand."

After leaving his commanding officer behind Mr. Spock forced the pace. He carried Mrs. Morrison most of the way himself. It was just after midday that they reached the Federation bridge. It stretched across a deep but narrow gorge, and though strong it swayed in the breeze. Spock would brook no delay, however; he hustled the others across, and despite her protests carried Mrs. Morrison. Then he drew his phaser and destroyed the bridge.

The Doctor asked quietly, "Was that really necessary?"

"You know it was, Doctor. It is downhill to the station. We should now be able to get there and call for help before the Klingons can reach us."

It was a steep but manageable path, and they made good time, arriving just before dark. The station was a squat, windowless building, apparently seamless, but for a Starfleet officer entry was easy. The interior was well stocked for emergency use.

Dr. McCoy soon had his patient settled. David Morrison returned after making full use of the fresher, to be told by the Doctor, "Your mother has stood up to the journey well, and should be fine if there's no more excitement."

"Are we safe here?"

"We should be. Spock has sent a message asking for help, and we should be rescued in a few days. This station is practically

impregnable, so we are in no danger until then."

"Thank you. I think I'll go and talk to Mr. Spock myself."

He found him in the adjoining room packing rope and medical supplies.

"You're going to go back to try and help Captain Kirk, aren't you? You'll just be killed, and anyway, how will you get across the gorge?"

The reply was even. "I will find a way."

"What? Against ten, maybe more, Klingons? Even a Vulcan isn't that good."

"I shall do what is necessary. Now if you will excuse me..."

"Not yet. If you have any chance of getting the Captain out alive you're going to need my help."

"Out of the question. You are a civilian."

"I'm of age, and I'm volunteering. If necessary you can sign me up or something. I can get a rope across that gorge in a few minutes. Oh, you could learn to use my bow in a few hours, but it will be light in one."

The Vulcan stopped and looked at the young man for the first time. "I shall be moving at speed. I will not be delayed."

"Understood."

"Notwithstanding your age your father's permission will be required. He has both professional and personal authority in such a matter."

"You mean that if he agrees I can go with you?"

"You may. I have a better chance of achieving my goal if there are two of us."

Commissioner Morrison was resting when David came to find him. Seeing his son he asked, "Have you had a look at your mother?"

"Not yet, but the Doctor says she's going to be all right. Do you know that Commander Spock is planning to return to try and help the Captain?"

"No, but it doesn't really surprise me. We are perfectly safe here, you know."

"And do you know that the chances of him pulling it off are lousy?"

"Yes, but I'm not about to waste my time telling him not to go. He may be Vulcan, but it's more than just duty. It can't be easy."

"Look, Dad, I've always thought you were disappointed in me because I used mother's influence and money instead of working for anything."

"Not really. You're young yet. You've never known anything else. You must be aware that being married to your mother has helped my career."

"Yes, but I can see that you care for her, and she wouldn't have it any other way. Look, dad, all those things I have - they don't mean a thing, really. I need something from you that's not easy to give. If you refuse I'll not shout or scream or even mention it again, but it's the only thing I've ever really wanted, and I'll know if you don't agree that you don't really trust my judgement."

His father looked at him long and hard, then said, "You frighten me, David. I'm too experienced a negotiator not to know when I'm being put on the spot. Tell me what you want."

So it was that a slightly stunned Dr. McCoy witnessed Mr. David Morrison taking an oath to become a temporary Starfleet officer.

Soon afterwards, before the day had properly begun, Spock and the young man set out up the path that led to the Klingons. The pace set by the Vulcan was very fast; David had to expend all his energy just to keep up. Slipping and sliding, he at last caught his breath as Spock stopped at the now bridgeless gorge.

This was the time for all the longbow practice to pay off. While Spock tied one end of a rope to a rock, David studied the trees on the other side of the gorge. The arrow flew straight and true, hitting the chosen tree with a thump, the angle of the rope being just what he had hoped. Would it hold? The Vulcan gave the rope a long hard pull. All seemed well.

Spock said quietly, "The denser Vulcan bone structure will make me heavier. You will go first."

The rope bent as the youth went across the ravine, feet crossed and hands wrapped with cloth. The last few feet with arms aching as the rope went upwards wasn't easy, but the hardest part was swinging from the rope to the edge of the ravine. With a deep breath, however, the move was made.

Spock then quickly sent their few supplies across, and after retying the rope he soon followed. He was across in half the time it had taken David, and swung to the ground without hesitation. Before David could protest Spock managed to unfasten the rope from both ends and quickly rewound it. He then set off down the path, and the Human could only follow.

They soon reached the place where they had left the Captain. Spock stopped and looked around; as he began to pick up the empty phaser packs his face was without expression.

David Morrison began to help, and it was he who found the brown blood stain. He pointed it out without a word, and the Vulcan examined it, still in silence. Soon they set out once more.

Next they came to the damaged shuttle. The luggage left behind was strewn over the grass. David saw with some distress his mother's possessions torn and broken. Of the Klingons, there was no sign.

Darkness was coming on, but Spock would brook no delay. "We must make for the Klingon observation station. That is where the

firing came from, and where the Klingons are likely to have returned."

David asked, before he could stop himself, "Do you think Captain Kirk is with them?"

"We shall see," was the brief reply.

They had to travel in the dark, the short rope between them the only real thing to the stumbling youth. At last the first light of dawn appeared. The trees and grass had given way to scrub and rock, so when they at last saw the station building and the Klingon craft beside it they hastily hid behind a small rock, the only cover.

They watched as two guards in military uniform crossed and recrossed the front of the building. One would pass within 30 metres of them while the other was out of sight at the corner of the building.

They returned to the trees and David asked, "Can we take care of the nearer guard before the other returns?"

"Not from this position. Klingon hearing is too good to use a phaser. We must wait until dark before we can get near enough."

"That's hours away, and they look as though they could be leaving. Look at all the boxes out there."

"I must prevent that at all costs. The Captain still lives, and I must prevent him from being taken to a Klingon base where they will make use of the mindsifter, which a Human, even with Command training, would be unable to withstand."

"Mindsifter? I've never heard of it."

"Its existence is not public knowledge. At its highest setting no Human has been known survive it - at least, not with sanity intact. I tell you this so that you will realise that if rescue is impossible Captain Kirk must not leave here alive."

"We've come here to kill the Captain? But he's your friend, and you are a Vulcan."

"I will do what is necessary. You will go and hide. The Klingons will not take time to search for you."

"But you'll be killed."

"Yes, but when the Federation rescuers arrive they will search this area, and you can then make yourself known to them."

"No way will I hide. Look, if I deal with the nearest guard, could you silence the other one before he can raise the alarm?"

"Possibly, but you are no match for a Klingon."

"An arrow would be swift and silent. The alternative would be much worse."

"To attack and possibly kill another should be a last resort."

"I'm staying with you, so it's either me or the guard. If you try and hide me away against my will Captain Kirk could be long

gone. Are you ready to take advantage of my shot?"

"Very well. I will not try to prevent this."

They returned to the place of concealment nearest to the guard's path and waited for him to come to the best position. As the arrow was fired the Vulcan was up and away. David, on seeing the Klingon fall, ran to him. As he had intended, the arrow had gone through the throat. Any cry had thus been prevented, but the result was a bloody mess.

The youth was staring in horror at his handiwork when Spock returned and said, "The other guard will be unconscious for approximately an hour. We must make full use of the time." He removed a knife and disruptor from the Klingon, and handing a phaser to David said, "Now that we have neutralised the guards we must check their vessel before we attempt to enter the station. I will enter the ship while you stand guard. If necessary the use of the phaser is now permissible."

Without waiting for a reply Spock studied the door of the ship, did something to the mechanism, and when the door opened disappeared inside. David waited anxiously, examining his surroundings. He was beginning to think of following the Vulcan when Spock returned saying,

"The only person I found was a Klingon Commander, whom I have immobilised. I also disabled the weapon I found there, which I believe was the one which fired on our vessel."

The door to the observation station was unlocked, and they entered quickly. The hall had doors on either side, and was full of crates. Each room was checked in turn; the first three were empty store rooms, and the fourth held a bank of machines. While the Vulcan went further inside, David stood just inside the door, waiting. The sound of a scuffle was followed by the sound of running feet. He checked the phaser many times, yet still he hesitated until it was almost too late. A Klingon appeared from the left, but just in time he fired, and the guard fell at his feet. Spock returned, and they both listened. Nothing - they appeared not to have been heard.

The last door on their left was locked. Spock soon had it open and went inside. There in the corner of the room was Kirk, bloody, but still able to ask, "Spock, what are you doing here?"

"Keeping a valuable Starfleet officer from being removed and interrogated."

"You're right, of course. Once the Klingons realised that you must have reached our station they got ready to leave. I've seen eight of them, but I know there are at least two more somewhere."

"We have come across five; the others must be in the inner rooms." As he spoke he removed a medical kit from his belt and gave the Captain an injection, pressed a disruptor into his hand and said, "I must leave you for the moment. Can you make use of this weapon if it should prove necessary?"

"Of course I can."

David put his head round the door. "Someone coming."

Two Klingons carrying boxes came through the far door, but they soon fell victim to a Vulcan neck pinch as they passed Spock hiding behind a crate. The two Federation men then entered that door, which led to a much larger room with tables, chairs and a food dispenser. The remaining Klingons were there, not in uniform, obviously not soldiers, and thus soon dealt with.

They returned to the Captain, who was already trying to stand.

Spock took his arm, saying, "All the Klingons have been dealt with, Captain. We can make use of their ship to return to the Federation observation station."

"What about their security arrangements, and what is a civilian doing here?" the Captain asked.

"The Klingons' somewhat primitive security is soon dealt with, and Mr. Morrison is here at his suggestion as a temporary Starfleet officer."

"I see. Everything's taken care of, is it?"

"Yes, sir, it is."

With Captain Kirk leaning heavily on his First Officer the three were soon at the Klingon ship. Spock settled his Captain in the main cabin with blankets and pillows, then turned his attention to the controls. He soon had the engine started and ready to leave.

The journey was short. Spock landed the vessel about 50 metres from the Federation station then left the ship and entered the station alone. He returned shortly with Dr. McCoy, who hurried inside and stood over his Captain.

McCoy couldn't hide the smile on his face as he chided gruffly, scanner whirring, "Well, Jim, I see you managed to get yourself knocked about again."

"This is nothing, Bones. They didn't have much time for me. After Spock destroyed that bridge their interest was in leaving before you were rescued. They wanted me in one piece for the journey."

"Oh yes. Cracked ribs and a broken collar bone don't count, I suppose."

"Could have been much worse. Could have been the mindsifter."

"Yes. David, come and give me a hand with the Captain."

Spock's voice came from the doorway. "Unnecessary, Doctor. I will carry the Captain." Without waiting for a reply he picked up his commander and walked with him towards the station.

The others followed.

Some time later David Morrison went to find his father. He had washed and changed, but had still not slept.

"Well, Dad, I'm now a civilian again."

"Are you sorry?"

"I don't know. They are pretty impressive, but I think they are too much for me. Did Mr. Spock tell you what happened with the Klingons?"

"He said that your contribution had been of use, but that it included some very distasteful decisions."

"Yes. I still think it was necessary, but I killed a man. Well, a Klingon, and when you're near them there's very little difference."

"You did what you thought was right. That's all any of us can do."

"I know, but I'm not sure I could do it again."

"That's good, David, but the freedoms we enjoy in the Federation have a price, and this time you were the one who paid. Mr. Spock tells me he thinks you would do well as a Starfleet officer. He's even willing to give you a recommendation. That's no mean thing from a Vulcan. Whatever you decide to do, I will make your mother understand. And whatever you decide to do, I am proud of you - but the final decision is yours."

"It's not easy. But then, nothing worthwhile ever is."

SILVER BIRD

Swept up on a wind of dreams
Our silver bird is more than she seems.
An idea, hope, wish, desire -
What more is needed to set your mind afire?

Sleek beauty beyond compare,
One we all, together, can share.
The ship, the crew we all know,
And they the future will show.

Our dream of life that is to come,
Full of hope and life for some.
Upon the wings of silent space
Our silver bird's path does face.

From the newest fall of alien dew
To the last remains of all we knew,
The silver bird of paradise does know
The humane seed she helps to sow.

That silver streak that does pass
In the darkest night, as we fast,
Her beautiful spirit is a prize,
That cocoon of safety, Enterprise.

Maggie Symon

BEFORE THE BEGINNING

by

Rosemarie Heaton

Admiral Henderson ended his monologue with, "Well, congratulations, Captain. If you come with me, I'll introduce you to the man you're replacing."

Newly-promoted Captain James T. Kirk trailed after the Admiral in a very bemused state of mind. His promotion had come as a distinct surprise to him if not to anyone else. Not that he had a false impression of his capabilities, but... He became aware that Admiral Henderson was speaking again.

"Fine ship, the Enterprise. Good crew, too. Her last refit upgraded her - 430 crew rather than 250, so a fair number of them haven't been with the ship for very long. Most of the bridge crew will be staying - gives you a better chance of getting to know the rest of the ship more quickly."

Kirk wasn't so sure, but he didn't contradict; he needed all his breath to keep up with the fast-moving Admiral.

Henderson stopped at a staff common-room, looked round, and moved towards a slim, dark haired man. "Chris," he boomed, "want you to meet James T. Kirk."

The two younger men eyed each other warily. "Congratulations on your promotion, Captain. You're getting a good ship and crew. I'm sorry to be leaving her."

"Come, come, Chris. All good things come to an end, you know."

Kirk winced at Henderson's bonhomie, but he did wonder for a moment at Pike's obvious reluctance to leave the Enterprise. After all, he was being promoted too, and he presumably wanted to be, or he would have refused it, wouldn't he? He returned his attention to the conversation and noticed they had been joined by several others.

Henderson was just saying, "... so I'll leave Jim in your capable hands, Chris, and I'll see you tomorrow at 09.00 sharp. We've a lot to go over before you leave."

Pike nodded. "Yes, sir. Until tomorrow, then." He waited until Henderson had left the room before turning to Kirk. "I thought you might like to meet some of your senior officers under informal conditions. I'm afraid I won't be able to show you over the ship myself, but Number One will do just as good a job."

He offered names and ranks. "Number One - Exec; Lt. Uhura - Communications; Lt. Sulu - Helmsman; Commander Mitchell - Navigation; Lt.-Commander Scott - Engineering. The CMO is retiring this time round. I gather you'll be given a list of possible replacements, or you may already have someone in mind."

The group sat and conversed desultorily over coffee. Kirk felt

he would have liked something a little stronger, but didn't feel he could suggest it. He continued to study faces. The only one he knew was Gary Mitchell - they'd been at the Academy together, and knew each other well. Lucky Gary wasn't overly ambitious, he reflected, or this promotion might create problems.

The Engineer looked quite young for his position; promotion was never very fast in Engineering, for some reason. The Exec looked interesting; it was going to be odd having a woman as First Officer.

He realised suddenly that there was someone missing. Waiting for a gap in the conversation he asked idly, "Is the Science Officer's post vacant at the moment?"

Six faces looked at him, only one with any real expression, and he was looking amused. Pike answered him.

"No, Spock left yesterday for a computer update course. He'll be away for six weeks. It has been arranged for the Enterprise to pick him up from Vulcan on your way out to your patrol sector."

Kirk looked a little surprised. Vulcan seemed a long way to go just to pick up a Science Officer.

Gradually he realised that he was intruding on a farewell party; embarrassed, he stood up to leave, arranging with Number One for a tour of the ship the following day.

"Well, good luck, Captain Pike."

"Thank you, and I'll wish you the same, Captain Kirk," was Pike's reply.

Kirk looked across at Mitchell and said casually, "I'm meeting McCoy at 20.00 in the Green Dragon if you can make it, Gary."

Mitchell nodded. "I'll see what I can do, Jim."

As Kirk left the small group he was aware of other people in the room watching him. A few braver souls offered congratulations as he passed; he acknowledged them, thinking that news certainly travelled fast around there.

Kirk was a few minutes early reaching the Green Dragon. Ordering a drink, he sat down to wait for McCoy; as he waited he went over in his mind the arguments he intended to use to persuade the Doctor to ship out with him. Deep in thought, he didn't hear the Doctor's approach.

"Penny for them, Jim?"

Startled, Kirk looked up and smiled. "I was just thinking about you, as a matter of fact. How'd you like to become my CMO?" he blurted out, his arguments disappearing as he looked at his friend.

McCoy pursed his lips. "Buy me a drink and maybe I'll think about it."

As Kirk waved a waiter over and placed an order McCoy continued, "I hear congratulations are in order, Captain."

Kirk beamed. "Yes - at least, I think so. It's a hell of a challenge - Captain of a Starship at one fell swoop. I was expecting something a little smaller. Still, if they think I can do it I'll just have to show them that they're right."

They sat quietly for a while, each immersed in his own thoughts. McCoy was very tempted by Kirk's offer; his divorce had been made final a few days before, and a total change of scene didn't seem such a bad idea. Also, he was fond of Kirk. Ah well, in for a penny, in for a pound, as the old saying went.

"Do you think you can swing it, Jim?" he asked.

"Shouldn't be too much of a problem. Pike's CMO is retiring, and he seemed to think I could suggest someone. I wanted to make sure that you were interested before I said anything, though."

"I think I could be persuaded," McCoy answered.

Kirk looked at him, seeing the tiredness and strain on the Doctor's face. "Bad, is it?" he asked sympathetically.

"You could say that," McCoy replied; then, in an attempt to change the subject, "Let's go and eat, and you can tell me all about your silver bird."

Kirk smiled. "I've barely seen her yet. She only arrived back in Spacedock a couple of days ago. By the way, I mentioned to Gary Mitchell we'd be here. I'll just leave a message for him."

McCoy nodded and watched as Kirk moved over to the bar, his normal jauntiness less visible than usual. *Hmmm... Panic setting in. Still, he'll get over it.* He rose as Kirk came back, and they left for a nearby Italian restaurant.

Halfway through the meal Mitchell joined them. "I got your message, Jim. Sorry I took so long, but we got rather involved."

Kirk laughed. "It's okay, Gary. Have you eaten?"

"Yes, thanks, and I'm due back on the ship in an hour's time, so I can't stay long."

The three talked for a while, Kirk wanting to question Mitchell about the Enterprise and her crew, but reluctant to do so. He knew he would be best off making his own observations, but in the end he couldn't resist one question.

"Gary," he began, "the Science Officer who's away on a course - I didn't quite catch his name when Pike mentioned him."

"Spock - Commander Spock. He's Vulcan, and has been with the Enterprise for years. I'd expected him to go with Captain Pike, but I was obviously wrong."

"Why?" Kirk asked.

"I'm not sure. They're not friends - no-one can be friends with a Vulcan, after all. He's good at his job, by the way, if you can stand the formality. Anyway, Jim, congratulations, and it'll be good to have you aboard. I'll see you tomorrow. 'Bye, Leonard, Captain."

"Why're you so interested in your Science Officer, Jim? It's not like you to gossip about crew members."

"I was curious as to why they'd divert a Starship to Vulcan to pick up a mere Science Officer, and I didn't catch his name when Chris Pike told me. Stupid - I knew that we had a Vulcan aboard, and where else would he be but in Sciences? Oh well, I daresay we won't get in each other's way."

"I'd never have thought you were prejudiced, Jim," was McCoy's answer.

Kirk's surprise was evident. "I'm not, I hope. I'm just not sure that Science Officers are bridge crew. We need men of action, not boffins."

McCoy smiled slightly. "I'm glad that it's his speciality that's the problem, not his origins."

"Origins? Oh, you mean the fact that he's Vulcan. That's no problem, although I've never had dealings with any. How about you?"

"Nope, nothing. I guess I'll have to do some reading, although as Vulcans are notoriously close-mouthed I'm not sure how much I'll find."

Kirk grinned inwardly at McCoy's words. It looked as though he'd got himself the CMO he wanted. Sighing, he leaned back in his chair.

"Well, Bones, I'm gonna have to call it a night. I've a ship's tour arranged for early tomorrow. Did I tell you the First Officer is female?"

They left the restaurant and walked towards McCoy's rooms, still talking.

Next morning a nervous Captain Kirk was ready on time for his tour. Number One made an excellent guide, and Kirk was quick to notice the crew's relaxed but efficient manner in her presence. All in all it seemed a happy ship, and he was beginning to see why Pike had been loath to leave. He had many questions to ask, and the Exec was ready with the answers. She definitely knew her ship, and Kirk was beginning to look forward to working with her when she dropped her bombshell.

"Of course, Captain, as you know my tour of duty ends shortly, and although I have agreed to stay on until Mr. Spock gets back, I shall be leaving the ship when she reaches Vulcan."

Kirk stared at her in dismay. "Er... no, I didn't know."

He was in fact appalled; a new ship and no First Officer. His mind began to race ahead. Maybe he could put in a good word for Gary; an Exec who was also a friend could be very useful. He stopped himself - no good thinking like that. He doubted they'd let him choose his own First just yet anyway. *Why me?* he asked himself plaintively.

Number One was regarding him quizzically. Had he spoken aloud?

"I'm sorry, sir," she repeated. "I didn't know you hadn't been informed, but I'm sure you'll find Mr. Spock competent. I like to think I trained him myself." She smiled slightly. "I'll show you your quarters now, sir, then you can have your things beamed up and start settling in."

Kirk thanked her and followed in a daze. Was she saying he had a Vulcan First Officer? Be damned to that - he'd then need to find a Science Officer. What in hell's name was Starfleet trying to do to him?

Once in his quarters he contacted Personnel, who told him that Admiral Nogura wished to see him, but had been delayed and would contact him later.

Damn! If Nogura was involved... Maybe he'd be as well checking staff records on board before trying to alter things. After arranging for his belongings to be delivered he began to reed Pike's reports on his officers.

Eventually, rousing himself, he set out to find sickbay and its retiring CMO. Piper was there, and willing to talk, giving Kirk potted histories of the senior officers with one exception - the Vulcan. Kirk was finding himself intrigued by the man, and began asking questions, to which Piper had few answers.

"Spock keeps himself to himself, but by that I don't mean that he avoids mixing with the crew. He eats in the main mess, plays chess with anyone daft enough to try; he even occasionally brings his harp in - usually at Uhura's request. What I'm trying to say is that he's his own man, and seems not to need close companionship. I'm not so sure he's right, but maybe he's never found anyone suitable. There's a challenge for you, Captain Kirk!" Piper laughed and turned the conversation to his own replacement.

Kirk told him about McCoy, and was relieved to hear that Piper knew him and thought that he would be a useful addition to the ship's complement.

"It's not an easy job. Ship's Doctors need to be all things to all men, but I think McCoy's got the compassion and the guts to do a very good job. I'll be pleased to back your recommendation, Captain."

Later that evening Nogura finally contacted Kirk. "So how was your first day, Jim?"

Kirk had to admit that 'confusing' was probably the best description he could come up with.

Nogura smiled. "Only to be expected. Anyway, I have a few things to discuss with you, but not over an open channel. If you'll beam down I'll have an aircar waiting for you."

Kirk, who had been planning an early night, agreed politely, then swore to himself before contacting the bridge.

"Captain Kirk here. I'm leaving the ship for a while. If you need me you can contact me through Admiral Nogura's office."

Number One acknowledged, and Kirk wondered in passing if she

ever went off duty.

On the bridge Number One and Uhura talked quietly. Uhura knew she was going to miss the tall, quiet woman a lot. Uhura was herself relatively new to the Enterprise, her appointment having taken place six months previously, and she had been pleased to find another woman on her shift on the bridge.

"How do you think Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock are going to get along?" she asked.

Number One looked at her. "I'd quite like to be here to find out. You'll need to let me know, Uhura."

Uhura nodded, and Number One continued, "I'm going to miss the Enterprise and the crew."

"Why leave, then?"

The older woman looked across at Uhura. "I have commitments elsewhere, and I think it's time Spock had a challenge."

Uhura giggled in reply; she couldn't wait for the volatile Captain and the taciturn Vulcan to meet.

Kirk's meeting with Nogura didn't last long. The Admiral backed his request for McCoy as CMO, but refused to listen to his plea for a non-Vulcan First Officer.

"Got something against Vulcans, Jim?"

"No, but I'll need a new Science Officer if you promote him." Kirk knew his excuse sounded feeble.

Nogura pursed his lips. "Thought you didn't think much of Science Officers anyway, Captain?"

"That's beside the point. I'll still need one."

"You'll have one - his name's Spock."

"Nobody can do both jobs, Admiral!" Kirk protested. The last thing he needed was a part-time Exec. "Surely," he continued, "if Commander Spock is a scientist, then he'd be happier left in Sciences?"

Nogura looked at him consideringly. "We are talking about a Vulcan, Captain, and a very special one at that. I intend for him to fulfil his potential. Yes, he would prefer to remain in Sciences, and so he shall. I want him as your second-in-command, so he is also going to do that. If Vulcans ever admitted to feelings then Spock is not 'happy' about his promotion, and it is up to you, Captain, to ensure that he becomes reconciled to the fact. We think you'll make a good team; I'm leaving it up to you to prove us correct. Okay?"

Kirk nodded, and left for a much-needed sleep.

Over the next few days he got on top of the paperwork, and his

crew grew used to him appearing in unexpected corners at odd times. McCoy joined the ship as CMO, along with another doctor called Boyce; he, like Piper, was nearing retirement, but his home was in the galactic arm Enterprise had as her patrol sector, and Starfleet had arranged for him to ship out with them.

Once en route for Vulcan Kirk used his time to get used to the ship, and to watch the interaction between officers and crew closely. They seemed a well-tuned unit, although the bridge crew had a distressing tendency (he thought) to glance towards the science station.

Eventually, having caught Mitchell's umpteenth glance sideways, he snapped, "Is this ship run entirely by its absent Science Officer, or do you sometimes use your own instruments?"

Mitchell jumped, and the rest of the bridge crew turned towards the Captain. Number One started to speak, but Kirk interrupted her harshly.

"Let Mr. Mitchell answer for himself."

Mitchell shrugged slightly. "Yes, we use our own instruments, but the Vulcan's very quick at interpretation. He sometimes seems to know what the computer's saying before it does."

Kirk looked round the bridge for reactions to that.

Scott said, "Make it *always* instead of sometimes. He seems to be able to hear and understand the codes."

Kirk snapped, "Well, I suggest you all get used to working for yourselves again. We have four weeks before we pick up Commander Spock. I have no wish to see any of you depend on anyone else, so I'd appreciate it if you'd break the habit - now!"

Four weeks can pass quickly under certain circumstances. Kirk was delighted with the Enterprise, very glad that McCoy and Mitchell were on board, and pleased that the crew seemed to be adapting well to the differences between himself and Captain Pike.

So, all too soon for Kirk, the ship was entering the Vulcan solar system. Now he was about to lose an exceptional First Officer and replace her with what to him was a totally unknown quantity.

He voiced his worries to McCoy, who replied flippantly, "I thought all Starship Captains were meant to be eminently adaptable." Then, more solemnly, "Jim, look at it this way - the Vulcan is a challenge. All this rubbish about no emotions - they just hide them well. Oh come on, Jim - Pike wouldn't have recommended him if he wasn't good."

Kirk grunted sourly. "Well I hope you're right or we're well and truly stuck. Nogura more or less intimated that I had to make this work. I always thought the Captain was meant to be important too."

"Well, maybe the Vulcan's got clout and Starfleet's trying to impress. Jim, for Christ's sake let's just meet the guy. If it was anyone else but you I'd be talking obsession. Just remember you're

the Captain, and in the last resort he has to obey your orders."

Orbit around Vulcan was easily achieved, and Kirk arranged short leave passes for those of his crew who wanted to visit a very hot desert world.

Turning to Number One he asked formally, "Have you arranged transport, Commander?"

The woman smiled slightly. "Yes, thank you, Captain. I'm staying with friends for a few days, and I have onward passage arranged."

"Well, I'd like to take this opportunity to say thank you for your help during my settling-in period. I am sorry to be losing you, Number One. Your successor will have a lot to live up to." Kirk floundered to a halt, cursing to himself.

"Thank you, Captain. Commander Spock is a competent officer. I'm sure you will encounter no problems."

As they had been speaking the turbolift doors had opened. Number One's gaze went over Kirk's shoulder, and she definitely smiled as she said, "Welcome back, Mr. Spock."

Kirk turned, annoyed at being caught discussing a crew member - especially by the person in question. His voice was formal. "Commander Spock, we were not expecting you until tomorrow."

Spock's gaze left the woman and settled on Kirk, who felt pinned under it. "I know, Captain Kirk. However, the conference finished yesterday, and I thought that Number One might appreciate an extra day with her friends."

She smiled. "Thank you, Mr. Spock. I most certainly would, if that is all right with you, Captain?"

Kirk nodded his permission, annoyed that the Vulcan had jumped the gun on him. He watched her as she left the bridge. Spock's cool voice intruded on his thoughts.

"You are not the only one to regret her resignation. I also would have preferred her to renew her contract."

So he had heard. *Damn him!* Kirk's thoughts tumbled over each other as he studied the man standing in front of him. Not what he'd expected, but then what *had* he been expecting? Someone older, less alien, maybe. Those ears, extremely elegant and obviously extremely sensitive. What else? Tall, with an impression of controlled power; very self-possessed, not the slightest sign of insecurity. It was going to be difficult to interpret this one's feelings. He became aware that Spock was speaking again.

"If you will excuse me, Captain Kirk, I have my belongings to see to."

"Yes, of course," he found himself mumbling, and then, determined to put himself on top of the conversation, "There will be no need for you to report for duty until tomorrow. However, I should like to talk to you. Please meet me in the Officers' Lounge at 19.00 hours. I'll introduce you to Dr. McCoy at the same time,



Commander."

Vulcan eyebrows on the rise, Spock's only answer was a seemly, "Yes, Captain."

Composed on the outside Spock might have been, but Kirk would have been very surprised to see the imperturbable Vulcan breathe a deep sigh of relief once he had reached the safety of his own quarters. This Human was very different from Captain Pike - for instance, his face could not hide much from a Vulcan adept at reading such faces. Captain Kirk was obviously no more pleased to have a Vulcan First Officer than that Vulcan was to be that First Officer. Perhaps he could...? No, he thought; both Captain Pike and Number One had recommended him for the position, and to refuse would be an insult to them.

His musings were interrupted by the door signal; he called, "Come!" and was unsurprised to see Number One. She settled herself on his bed and proceeded to talk at him; Spock reflected that he had spent a great deal of his life being talked at, starting with his father. At least his mother usually talked to him.

"Are you listening to me?" the woman on his bed demanded eventually.

Spock looked at her, debated lying, and then said, "No."

She laughed. "I didn't think you were. Spock, you must realise that Captain Kirk is a very different man from Christopher Pike. He's impetuous, even hot tempered. You aren't, and therefore can act to balance him. You must be willing to stand up to him, contradict him if you are sure that your observations are correct. Also, remember that he does not have Captain Pike's experience. In fact," she glanced up at Spock, "he's a couple of years younger than you. However, he'll be good for you, and although I know you will not believe me, you will be good for him." She looked at the Vulcan, wondered whether to say anything more, and decided against it. She stood up to leave.

"If you are able, I should like to keep in contact."

Spock looked at her. "If it would please you, then of course we may keep in contact."

"Good. I will say farewell, then. Live long and prosper, Spock."

He returned her salute and watched her leave, knowing that a chapter of his life was ending and a new one beginning.

At 19.00 hours promptly Spock presented himself in the Officers' Lounge. The room was empty except for Gary Mitchell, who grinned.

"Don't normally see you in here, Spock."

The Vulcan replied stiffly, "Captain Kirk arranged to meet me here at 19.00 hours. He is late."

"Oh, in trouble already. How d'ye manage that?"

The Vulcan was saved from replying by the entry of Kirk and McCoy. Kirk looked at Mitchell, and angled his head towards the door, saying, "Gary, I'd like a word with you later. You could come back around 20.00. Thank you."

Mitchell looked a little surprised at his rather abrupt dismissal, but left with a cocky salute. "Yes, of course, Captain sir."

Kirk glanced at McCoy, who shrugged his shoulders. Spock observed the byplay with increasing tension - he wasn't against informality in the correct place, but he did not like Mitchell's tone of voice.

Kirk turned to him. "Sorry to keep you waiting, Commander. This is Dr. McCoy, our new CMO. Dr. McCoy - Commander Spock."

Spock nodded politely, wondering why Kirk was bothering with this. McCoy started to put his hand out, noticed that the Vulcan's hands were clasped behind his back, and changed it to folding his arms instead.

"Pleased to meet you, Commander. I've never had a Vulcan as a patient before, so I'd appreciate it if you'd allow me to take some base readings for comparison purposes."

Spock, who had been about to point out that he was not in fact one of the doctor's patients, stiffened at that last comment. "My quarterly medical was done just before I left for Vulcan, Dr. McCoy. I really see no need for further tests."

McCoy grinned. "I know, but I didn't run them."

"Are you accusing Dr. Piper of incompetence, Dr. McCoy?"

"No, of course not, but..."

"Then my answer stands, Doctor."

"Why you..." McCoy got no further as Kirk interrupted them.

"That's enough, Bones." He turned to Spock. "I appreciate your loyalty to Dr. Piper, Commander, but I also feel that Dr. McCoy has a point. You will therefore present yourself in his surgery for a full examination. Dr. McCoy will give you an appointment."

Spock's "If you insist, Captain Kirk" was barely audible.

McCoy was jubilant. "Good, that's settled, then. When d'ye go on duty, Commander?"

"09.00 tomorrow, ship's time."

"Right. If you don't mind, Jim, the Commander can wend his way to my office any time after that. You should have him back for lunch," McCoy laughed, all trace of his former temper gone.

Kirk, meanwhile, was watching the Vulcan, whose demeanour stiffened even further at McCoy's last sally. He was puzzled by the man, but felt that now wasn't going to be a good time to draw him out. "Okay then, Bones. That shouldn't be a problem. I doubt I'll run into trouble I can't handle that early into the patrol."

McCoy left, still pleased with his victory and planning a very thorough examination for the unfortunate Vulcan. *After all, he said to himself, it's not every day one gets a bona-fide alien all to oneself.*

The two men left in the Officers' Lounge eyed each other warily. Both were very much aware that they were teetering on a knife edge. Kirk decided to try and cool things down a little. He laughed inwardly; cool things down - warm them up might be more appropriate. The atmosphere was decidedly icy.

Spock forestalled him. "Captain Kirk, I understood that when you made this appointment you wished to talk to me. May I enquire as to exactly what it was you wanted to discuss?"

"Yes, sit down, Commander. I was kinda interested in how you intend to combine the jobs of First Officer and Science Officer. I am a little surprised at Starfleet expecting one person to do both jobs." He wasn't really expecting a detailed answer, so was a little taken aback at the depth of Spock's reply.

"Well, you do seem to have it all planned out, Commander. We'll just need to wait and see how it all works out, won't we?"

Spock glanced at him and then away again. Uncharacteristically he hesitated before saying, "Captain Kirk, if you would prefer another as your First Officer, I would not object if you were to cancel my preferment."

To say Kirk was surprised was an understatement. "Where in hell's name did you get that idea?" he blustered. As Spock stated to answer he waved him to silence.

"Let's get one thing straight, shall we? As far as I am aware I have a competent First Officer. If the case is ever proven otherwise, then and only then shall I consider replacing that officer. However, I wouldn't recommend any deliberate attempt to prove me wrong because that will only backfire on you. There will be no place either on my ship or in Starfleet for an incompetent Science Officer. I take it that you and I now understand our relative positions?"

Spock nodded. "Yes, sir. If that is all, sir, I have work to do."

"Oh no you don't. You start work tomorrow. For now, I would like to learn a little more about you as a person."

"My personal details are all on file, sir."

"I know, I've read them and Captain Pike's report. You interest me, Commander. You've less on your file than the average Academy student, and how long have you been in the service?"

"13.84 of your years, sir."

"That was what we Humans term a rhetorical question, Commander. I'm sure you realise that there is no need to answer them."

"Yes, sir." Very stiff.

Silence followed as they stared at each other. Kirk had an



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uneasy feeling that Spock had no intention of telling him anything. Eventually Kirk gave in.

"Well, I'm still waiting, Commander."

"I repeat, Captain, my personal details are all on file."

"And that's it, is it? Now you just listen to me, Commander Spock. As your superior officer I expect answers when I ask questions. Is that understood?"

"Perfectly, sir, and in an on-duty situation I will answer any question put to me concerning that situation. When off duty, I am entitled to my privacy."

Spock watched the Human's complexion turning red. Perhaps luckily, Mitchell returned at that moment. Kirk dismissed Spock abruptly, turned to Mitchell, and obviously restraining his temper advised the Navigation Officer about how he wished to be spoken to in front of the crew, and that a little more respect for the First Officer would not come amiss.

Mitchell took it all without rancour; he was well aware that he tended towards the flippant. "Yes, Captain," he answered mildly, and Kirk laughed suddenly.

"I mean it, Mr. Mitchell, but I admit I didn't intend to subject you to my bad temper. Right, lecture over. I'm going to the main rec room. Fancy a coffee?"

McCoy fared no better than Kirk the following morning. An icily polite Vulcan allowed the doctor to do all the physical tests he could think of, but personal information was definitely off-limits.

Kirk, on hearing this, decided to let things ride for the moment. He knew he needed to see how Spock interacted with the crew under normal working conditions, and pushing the Vulcan for information he was unwilling to give might well affect that interaction. Instead he and McCoy, unknown to each other but noticed by Spock, began reading up on the planet Vulcan and its inhabitants. Not that there was much available; Vulcan privacy seemed to be sacrosanct, and Starfleet did not interfere.

As time passed Kirk found himself relying more and more on his First Officer. He smiled wryly to himself as he remembered bawling out his bridge crew for the very same offence. Often Spock seemed to anticipate a question before Kirk had started to formulate it.

When Kirk's very small joke about telepathy fell very flat, it was Uhura who plucked up courage to explain to the confused Captain that Spock was in fact a telepath, but that Vulcans had very strict moral codes governing its use.

Later that same day Kirk approached the Vulcan, who was engrossed in a seismic study of the planet they were orbiting. He watched him for a few moments, marvelling at the Vulcan's capacity for work and attention to detail that made his work the envy of others.

"Commander," he said quietly.

Spock looked up and replied, "One moment, please, Captain." He continued working, then, "Yes, sir?"

"Could you spare me a few moments of your time?" Kirk asked more dryly than he had intended. *Why am I always on the defensive?* he asked himself. *Probably because you're always expecting to be rebuffed,* was his own answer.

Spock considered him. "Yes, sir. I am about to go for my meal break. If that would be suitable?"

Kirk nodded, and leaving Mitchell with the con the two officers entered the turbolift.

"Did you have a topic you wished to discuss with me, Captain?" The Vulcan eventually broke the silence.

Kirk smiled faintly. "More of an apology I wish to make, Commander."

"Apology, sir? I do not understand." An uplifted eyebrow accompanied Spock's statement.

Kirk sighed, wishing he'd never started. "I made a joke earlier about you knowing my mind before I did. I was unaware at the time that Vulcans are telepathic. I did not mean to insult you."

Spock stared at him. "Captain, we are delaying the turbolift. If you would join me, I will try to explain my position."

Together they made their way to the mess. Kirk selected his lunch and then eyed the Vulcan's tray.

"Is that all you're going to eat?"

Eyebrows on the rise again, Spock answered, "Captain, Vulcan is a desert world. For millennia my people lived with the prospect of famine. Evolution has ensured that our metabolisms are most efficient, and waste is abhorrent to us."

"Do you mean that you don't like to eat?"

"No, Captain; I mean that we eat for survival."

Kirk shrugged and began eating. Spock followed suit. One thing that Kirk had learned was that Vulcans generally did not talk while eating, and so he kept quiet.

When Spock had finished he steepled his hands and looked at Kirk. "With your permission, sir?"

Kirk nodded, his mouth full.

"To return to your apology, Captain. It is true that most Vulcans are telepathic. Like all such talents the degree varies with the individual. In general, however, we are touch telepaths; in order for me to touch a non-telepath's mind - such as yours, Captain Kirk - I would need to be in physical contact with you. I am unable to read your mind from a distance. I should also say that my cultural conditioning expressly forbids the forcible entry of

another's mind in all but the most extreme circumstances. However, during my years in Starfleet I have learned to interpret Human facial expressions. You, Captain, have a very expressive face even by Human standards. You had no knowledge of this, and there is therefore no need for an apology. It is not logical to apologise for an insult that never existed."

"I see. Thank you, Mr. Spock." Changing the subject Kirk continued, "You play chess, don't you? Would you indulge your Captain a little further and play a game?"

For a moment he was sure that the Vulcan was going to refuse - he could almost see the shutters descending - then Spock said, "Thank you, Captain. It is a while since I played with a Human."

"Oh? Who did you play with then?"

"Sometimes with Captain Pike, and occasionally with Number One."

"And who won?" Kirk asked as he watched Spock setting out the pieces.

"I did, mostly. Captain Pike was sometimes erratic in his approach to the game."

"Meaning he won on those occasions?"

"No, not always."

Kirk smiled; he thought he might have a few surprises for this Vulcan. However, this time he was soundly beaten. The second game he had his eye in, and gave Spock a run for his money.

The Vulcan thanked Kirk. "If you would be interested, we could play some other time, Captain. I am due in the geology lab for the results of the seismic survey."

"Yes, I'd like that. Tomorrow evening, maybe? "

Spock nodded. "I foresee no difficulty, Captain. Do you just wish to see the results?"

For a moment Kirk was a little taken aback, then he realised that the Vulcan was referring to the survey he had been running earlier.

"Just the conclusions should do, unless there is something very odd about them. Listen, I'll come down with you now and we can discuss the findings."

They left the mess and made their way towards the geology lab. Spock was silent, and Kirk concluded that although the Vulcan might be somewhat verbose when answering a specific question, he was otherwise very quiet. A tranquil quiet, though, to be enjoyed rather than resented.

They reached the lab at the same time as the Chief Geologist, Dr. Taylor. Kirk decided that it was probably of more use to him to listen to the two men discuss the survey results than to read the conclusions. They were both in agreement that a land-based survey was necessary to finalise the report, but that it must be both small and quick.

In answer to Kirk's query Spock said, "There is considerable minor seismic activity. However, our survey has not been done over a long enough time period for us to be certain that we have fixed the pattern. Therefore we need a highly mobile, experienced party, with as little equipment as possible. It may become necessary to beam the party up very quickly."

"So, who do you recommend, Mr. Spock?"

"Myself, geologists Norton and Fenwick, and two of the more experienced security guards - probably Lt. Giotto and Chief Marshall."

"Fair enough. What about other aspects of the planet's ecology, Spock?"

"Vegetation is rather sparse, Captain, likewise the animal life. There are no intelligent life-form readings on the surface, although there are traces of what could once have been dwellings. The constant earthquake activity means that life must be somewhat precarious down there."

"Mmm, I see. So nothing much else to look for but mineral deposits? Well, get your landing party equipped, Commander. I'd like to move on as soon as possible."

"Yes of course, Captain. Dr. Taylor, if you would alert Norton and Fenwick, I will expect them in the transporter room in ten minutes. I will contact Security."

As they walked towards the transporter room Kirk asked why Spock had left the Chief Geologist behind.

"Dr. Taylor is a geophysicist, Captain; he has more experience in interpreting readings than Mr. Norton. Mr. Fenwick is our most experienced geochemist. Dr. Taylor will keep a close watch on our ship's sensors. He will be able to pick up readings over a greater distance than our hand-held instruments, and should have time to warn us of the need to evacuate the planet surface if a severe earthquake occurs."

"And if he doesn't?"

"Then we will need to take our chances along with the rest of the planet's inhabitants."

Kirk frowned. He wasn't happy about sending men down under such risky conditions. An idea struck him, and he looked up to find Spock watching him warily.

"I see no reason why you should accompany the landing party, Captain, especially as you have no useful specialist training. If we do run into trouble you would just be one more person to rescue."

At first Kirk was inclined to be offended, then realising the truth of the Vulcan's words he smiled impishly and said, "Very well, I'll bow to your superior judgement this time, Commander."

Spock just looked at him. "Very sensible, Captain." Turning to Lt. Kyle, he proceeded to give him coordinates for beam down. "We may need to be brought back at a moment's notice, Lieutenant. You will keep an open com link with the geology lab, and be on the alert at all times."

The party had assembled by now, and Kyle sent them down to the pre-arranged coordinates. Lt. Giotto switched his communicator to an open channel.

The geologists started their work while Spock and Marshall went towards a nearby stand of vegetation to collect soil and botanical samples. The almost constant trembling of the planet's surface was disconcerting. The Humans found difficulty in standing upright at first, but soon adapted.

While he worked Spock mused on the adaptability of the Human race. Vulcans seemed less capable of adapting; possibly their superior intelligence, strength and longevity had negated adaptability as a useful tool? He would need to consider the question more closely.

Satisfied that he and Marshall had got all they needed, he stood up to indicate to the security man to rejoin the others. Marshall was staring at something behind the Vulcan. Spock turned to see an electrical storm moving towards them. He tried to contact the ship, but the interference was too great.

The other men had now joined them; Norton was trying to tell him something, and Spock realised that some of the noise was the beginning of a severe earthquake. Except for the copse of tall plants there seemed to be no shelter. Moving as fast as they could the party headed for the centre of the plants. By now it was so dark that they had to grope their way forward behind Spock.

When he thought they had reached the centre of the wood Spock indicated that they should stop and try to erect some form of shelter. Leaving the two geologists to help the security men he moved on, certain that he had caught a glimpse of a structure. If it was in good condition, it might be of use as a shelter.

The first major wave of earthquake hit them at the same time as the storm. Violent rain, lightning and the rolling ground gave a distinct impression of being at sea.

Giotto muttered to Marshall, "Let's hope nobody gets seasick! Where's that damned Vulcan got to now? I'll get my head in my hands if I go back without him."

"I feel sure that the best place for your head is on your shoulders, Lieutenant," a cool voice answered him.

Giotto felt his heart lurch with the shock. Why couldn't Vulcans learn to move more noisily?

Spock continued, "There is a roofed structure nearby. We may as well try to reach it - it will at least stop us from getting wet." Vulcans, like cats, were none too happy at getting wet.

The wind had already damaged their makeshift shelter, so the four Humans were happy enough to follow Spock. Gathering their belongings they rushed as quickly as possible over the uneven ground towards the shelter.

Once inside it was as if the storm and earthquake had disappeared. Norton put his head back outside.

"Conditions are as bad as ever," he reported.

Spock raised an eyebrow. "Mr. Giotto, please try to raise the Enterprise."

While Giotto made the attempt Spock and Marshall explored the small shelter.

"Mr. Spock, the Captain would like to speak to you."

Spock took the communicator from Giotto. "Spock here, Captain."

"What happened, Commander?"

"At this moment I am not sure, sir. An electrical storm blew up with extreme rapidity, and at the same time we were hit by a stronger than usual earth tremor. We decided to seek some form of shelter, and found the structure we are presently in. It would appear to have some form of dampening properties, as we are scarcely aware of the storm."

"Are you ready to beam up?"

"Negative. I think we should transport something less valuable than a living being first, Captain."

Kirk agreed, and the transporter was thoroughly tested. It appeared to be working perfectly, and Kirk ordered the party to beam up.

Spock requested permission to remain on the surface. "Now the storm is abating, Captain, I should like to take the opportunity to examine the outside of this structure. I feel its properties could be very important on other worlds prone to excessive seismic activity."

"Okay, but be careful."

"I am never anything else, Captain," Spock replied.

On the bridge Mitchell turned to Kirk. "Not always true, Captain. If Mr. Spock gets totally involved he tends to forget his immediate surroundings."

Kirk looked round the rest of the bridge crew and received affirmative nods from most of them.

Scott said, "I wouldn't agree to the totally - he does seem to keep one section of his mind on watch - but I think he is uninterested in the possibility of danger. Knowledge is more important than watching his back."

"Right. Mr. Mitchell, you have the con. I'll be with Commander Spock."

Kirk left for the transporter room; the bridge crew looked at one another, shrugged their shoulders, and returned to their various tasks.

As Kirk materialised on the planet's surface he stumbled - it was not a good surface to beam down on. He couldn't see Spock at first, but he could hear him.

"There was no reason for you to beam down, Captain. I am - whatever the bridge crew might say - quite capable of doing two things at once."

"Never thought you couldn't, Mr. Spock. I felt like a walk, and sometimes two pairs of eyes are better than one."

"Agreed. In that case would you like to help me examine this structure?"

The two men went over the shelter in minute detail.

"D'you think it's here for the reason you used it, Spock?"

"There would seem to be no other useful explanation that springs to mind, Captain."

"Who built it, then?"

"That I am unable to answer. I should like to visit some of the ruins if that is possible. There are some a short distance away. It would be less tiring if we allow the ship to transport us there."

Kirk flipped open his communicator and soon they were at the ruins.

"Why do you think these are in ruins while the shelter's in perfect condition, Commander?"

"Any one of a number of reasons, Captain. This could be an abandoned village, or it could be a lot older than the shelter we have just left."

"Can't you tell?"

"Not as yet. The mode of building is different; the building blocks are joined by some kind of mortar. I think that these ruins will prove to be very much older than the shelter." Spock had been keeping one eye on the sky as he spoke, and now he said, "Captain, I think it might be sensible to return to the ship."

"Why? You can hardly have looked at anything yet. Look, there's another shelter over there."

"I see it, Captain." Spock was moving as he spoke, certain that he caught a flicker of movement elsewhere in the village.

The Human was heading towards the building, and an extra hard tremor threw him to the ground. As Spock reached him he was already scrambling to his feet. "Let's get inside!" he gasped. The noise of the approaching storm was making itself heard by now.

As they more or less fell inside the shelter the storm broke, but as before they seemed to be cocooned in safety.

"Why in hell's name didn't your sensors pick up these damned storms, Commander?" Kirk's tone was angry.

"Because they were not there to be picked up, Captain. There was no atmospheric disturbance at all. I should have realised that." He stopped, thought for a few moments. "I think that these storms are deliberate, maybe a warning that our presence is

unwelcome."

"I thought you said there is no intelligent life on this planet," Kirk accused him.

"If you think back, I believe I said that there are no intelligent life form readings on the surface."

"Pedantry, Commander." Kirk's voice was hard.

"Not so, Captain. You must realise that there was always the possibility that the intelligence that built the now ruined habitations was still present on the planet. I assume that at some time in their past they must have moved underground, and that they built the shelters to provide just that. Although one thing puzzles me: any life form capable of building such earthquake-proof shelters..." He broke off as he caught a movement behind Kirk.

As Kirk stiffened and began to turn the figure hesitated, and then moved into the shelter. It was humanoid, slimly built, and tall.

Kirk held both hands palm up towards the alien and said, "Greetings. I am Captain Kirk, and this is Commander Spock. We came in here to shelter from the storm."

The alien moved further into the shelter. It touched a wall and a muted light came on. In its glow the three studied one another. The alien replied in a liquid language, then seeing their incomprehension touched a small toggle on his belt.

Spock's eyebrows rose. "He must have been able to understand Standard, Captain, and expected us to understand him."

"So it would seem," Kirk whispered back.

The alien was speaking again. "We apologise for our unfriendly welcome, Captain Kirk. We were unaware of your presence, and our defence system was on automatic; it reacted before we could switch it off."

Spock's eyebrows disappeared, and Kirk was in sympathy with him.

The alien continued, "However, as you are here maybe you would like to meet the rest of us."

Kirk replied, "Yes, of course. We would be honoured." He wished he knew what the Vulcan was thinking.

Spock showed no reaction as the alien pressed another toggle and they started to move downwards. As the motion stopped he indicated that they should leave the platform. They walked down a corridor and entered a large room where three other aliens were waiting.

Spock edged towards Kirk. "Captain, I have noted several discrepancies, and I would advise extreme caution in your dealings with these people."

"First contacts always require caution, Commander. You should be aware of that fact," Kirk snapped.

Undaunted the Vulcan replied, "This is not a first contact for them, Captain. I think they are well used to contact with alien races."

Kirk glared at him, but knew that Spock was right.

Their alien companion invited the two men to sit down. He introduced himself as Malka, and his companions as Tora, Dycil and Nyan.

"We are a scientific team," he explained. "We are here as observers."

Spock interjected, "With a defence system of the complexity of this one, I hesitate to accept that as an explanation."

"Oh, the defence system isn't ours - we just found it."

Kirk thought it was Tora who answered. Spock gazed at the alien, scepticism imprinted on his body posture, but he said nothing further.

Malka continued to explain. "We are from a neighbouring planet, and have only recently developed space flight. This planet is our closest neighbour. It was only natural that we should land here first."

Kirk nodded his agreement, desperately hoping that Spock would keep his mouth shut. "Of course, entirely natural. We are representatives from the United Federation of Planets, and we are on an exploratory mission. Our brief is to survey uncharted regions, and also to explain the workings of the Federation to the peoples we encounter, and invite them to join us."

Malka looked startled. "Yes, I see, but we can hardly answer such an invitation, Captain. It would have to be presented to our High Council."

"I realise that, sir," Kirk continued. "All we would do is to give you the information, and if you were interested we would contact the Federation Council for you. It is they who would conduct any negotiations."

Spock had remained silent throughout the conversation, but he now roused himself. "Captain Kirk, you are overdue to contact the ship. Mr. Mitchell will be wondering what has happened to us."

Kirk looked at him. "Yes," he said; then turning to the aliens he continued, "If I may speak with my ship, I must assure them of our well-being. They will be concerned at our apparent disappearance."

The aliens looked at one another and Tora replied, "Your communications device will not work below the surface. These dwellings are made of a material that does not allow penetration by such weak signals. You may use our communications network. If you, Captain Kirk, would like to go with Malka he will show you the system. Commander Spock may wait here with us."

Spock moved slightly, but stopped where he was, eyeing the weapon that had suddenly appeared in Dycil's hand. He glanced at Kirk, who couldn't see what had happened, and said, "Please do what he says, Captain Kirk. I am sure you can arrange matters with Mr.

Kyle without my presence."

Kirk frowned at him, noting the stiff posture and the direction of Spock's gaze as he did so. He followed Malka to another room, where the alien showed him how to operate the console.

Ostentatiously laying his own communicator down Kirk managed to press the alert button, hoping that Tora had been lying earlier. He held a brief conversation with Mitchell, and then spoke to Kyle. Moments later both Kirk and Malka materialised in the transporter platform to find Kelso and Kyle with phasers drawn.

Malka turned to Kirk. "There was no need to kidnap me, Captain. We would have been honoured to visit your ship, but your precipitate action may have endangered your officer's life. Tora will be aware that we are no longer on the planet."

"Why was Dycil holding a weapon on Spock?" Kirk demanded instead of answering. He and Kelso herded the alien with them on their way to the bridge.

Uhura turned to him as they left the turbolift. "Communication from the planet, Captain."

"Put it on visual please, Lieutenant," Kirk replied.

The screen cleared to show Tora. "Ah Captain Kirk, there you are. We thought you might have gone missing in our maze of corridors. I trust that Malka is with you and unharmed?"

"I trust in return that Commander Spock is unharmed?" Kirk replied smoothly.

Tora glanced over his shoulder, and Spock moved into Kirk's line of vision. Kirk indicated to Malka to do the same.

"Stalemate, Tora?"

Tora nodded. "I agree, Captain. I no more wish to lose my lieutenant than you want to lose your officer. I suggest we try and reach a compromise."

Spock spoke quietly. "No, Captain, do not. I suspect this is a p...r..." He crumpled quietly and the screen blanked.

Kirk turned a furious face to Malka. "I hope for your sake he hasn't been badly injured."

Malka just stared back. Kirk ordered Security to the bridge, and the alien was taken to the brig, minus the unusual belt he had been wearing.

"Uhura, see if you can raise the planet. Gary, see if Mr. Spock's instruments can penetrate that shielding. I would like to be able to pinpoint him if at all possible."

Both officers reported negatively and Gary continued, "The storms are increasing in severity. We will lose all contact shortly."

"Damn!" Kirk muttered. "See if I ever listen to that Vulcan again! Gary, you come with me - I think Mr. Malka has some talking to do."

Leaving Kelso with the con and instructions to run the aliens' names through the library computer, Kirk and Mitchell made their way to the brig. Malka was sitting looking at the floor, but he glanced up as they entered.

"How long do you intend to keep me here, Captain?"

"As long as necessary. Your names are being checked at the moment. If there is any evidence on which we can hold you, you will be returned to the nearest Starbase to stand trial."

"And leave your friend here," Malka sneered.

"Commander Spock is an officer in Starfleet. As such he is expendable, and will expect nothing else. Your friends have no possibility of getting off that planet without us picking them up. By the way, I assume that you know how to turn the defence system off?"

Malka glared but didn't answer. A security guard indicated to Kirk that there was a call from the bridge for him. Leaving Mitchell with the alien, Kirk went to speak to Kelso.

"They've all got records. They seem to have started as political refugees from a planet called Sarla. They stole a spacecraft to escape and haven't looked back. You could try threatening him with extradition - they're all under death penalties on their home planet. Just one moment, Captain - Uhura says she has a call coming through from the planet, sir."

"Right. Ask her to transfer it to me in the briefing room. Have McCoy and Scott join me there, will you, Lee."

Kirk motioned to Mitchell to join him in the corridor and quickly gave him the gist of Kelso's report. "Go back in there and threaten him - make out I intend to repatriate him, but if he cooperates you'll try to dissuade me. Meanwhile I'll go and see what his friends want. Bring him up in about ten minutes."

"Okay, Jim," was Mitchell's laconic reply.

Malka seemed to be getting increasingly nervous at the constant movement around him. Kirk watched for a moment, then turned and headed towards the briefing room, where McCoy and Scott were waiting for him. He checked that Uhura still had the call on hold, then asked Scott if he had come up with anything.

Scott shook his head. "Not yet. I'm having to go slowly as I don't want to trigger any destructive capabilities. To tell truth, I could do with Mr. Spock."

Kirk sighed and ignored the last comment. "I'm pretty certain it was a hand weapon they were holding on Spock, so they probably aren't fully conversant with the belts either. Bones, how about Spock?"

"I have absolutely no idea, Captain."

"Very well then, let's then this call over and done with. I'd like this sorted out before much longer." He called the bridge, and a few seconds later was facing the three aliens. "Well, gentlemen, and what can I do for you?"

Dycil answered him. "We'd like to discuss terms for an exchange of prisoners, Captain Kirk."

Kirk's eyebrows rose. "Terms of exchange? Malka is under arrest for piracy and treason. I do not know whether Commander Spock is even alive. I'm hardly likely to discuss exchange of prisoners under such circumstances."

Dycil seemed a little worried. "Commander Spock is still alive. How is Malka?"

"You show me Spock and I'll show you Malka," was Kirk's reply.

"There may be a short delay, Captain. Commander Spock is elsewhere in the complex. We will need to fetch him."

"You've got ten minutes. Kirk out." He terminated the connection quickly and contacted Uhura. "Did you get co-ordinates?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Feed them to the transporter room please, Lieutenant. Thank you." Turning to the others he asked, "What are the chances of Spock's escape?"

McCoy shrugged. "He's obviously not immediately available, but he could still be unconscious."

Scott thought for a moment, obviously unsure how to phrase what he wanted to say. "Mr. Spock is quite adept at getting himself out of awkward corners, sir."

"And into them, if this is anything to go by," McCoy muttered darkly.

Kirk ignored him, thought for a moment, and then paged Mitchell; when he appeared he reported that Malka was becoming more fretful by the minute.

Kirk nodded and turned to Scott. "Mr. Scott, please go to the bridge and take the con. Send Mr. Kelso to join us in the transporter room. I'm going to chance Uhura's coordinates. If they do attempt to escape, put a tractor beam on them."

"Aye aye, sir."

McCoy said, "I'd best go and get my gear then, Jim."

"Okay, but get a move on - we've only got seven minutes before they contact us again."

Two minutes later six men materialised within the pirates' stronghold. There was no-one to greet them.

"Right, in twos - spread out and search. Phasers on stun, and use them if necessary. McCoy, you'd best come with me. I think the room we were in is just down here."

The room was empty. Kirk shrugged and pulled out his communicator; he was about to contact the ship when they heard footsteps in the corridor. There was nowhere to hide, so as the door opened Kirk was already firing. Two aliens slid to the ground, and McCoy ran forward with his medicorder already running.

"They seem all right, but I'd like to get them to sickbay as soon as possible. Chapel can take care of them."

"Yes, of course, Bones." Kirk contacted the ship and the men were soon on their way to sickbay.

"Just Spock and the other one to find, then. I think the one with Dycil was Tora, so we're looking for Nyan." He flipped his communicator open again as it bleeped. "Kirk here."

Mitchell answered. "We've found their ship. Nice little long-range yacht. No sign of anything living on board, though. Have you had any luck?"

"Yes, two down and one to go. What's happening, Gary? That sounded like phaser fire."

"I'm not sure, Jim. It must be Kelso. Taylor's gone to have a look. I'll call you back."

With the connection broken Kirk and McCoy looked at each other then left the room, heading in the general direction the others had taken. They hadn't gone far before they picked up the sound of phasers.

McCoy whispered to Kirk, "Could there have been more than four of them?"

Kirk, annoyed with himself for not having thought of that earlier, snapped back, "Possibly - we never got beyond basic introductions. Keep your head down."

They reached a wide open space that looked like a docking area. It was littered with cases and land vehicles, but there was only one spacecraft in sight.

"Nifty little thing, isn't she?" Kirk murmured.

The battle seemed concentrated over on the far side. Sidling from cover to cover they made their way towards the noise. It was at moments like this that McCoy remembered he was meant to be doctor, not a soldier. Eventually they reached Mitchell.

"What's happening?" Kirk asked.

"There's at least two of them holed up behind those cases over there. Marshall's gone to see if he can get round behind them."

Suddenly the lights dimmed, flickered and then brightened again.

"Spock, I'll bet," Mitchell whispered. "He must have found the main power banks."

"Right, let's move, then - we need to be in position before he dowses them completely. McCoy, stay here."

Mitchell followed Kirk, while the lights continued to flicker. Kirk wasn't totally convinced that Mitchell was right, but he wasn't going to argue about it. They had gone as far as they dared in the harsh light when everything suddenly sank into total darkness. Rushing forward, they converged on the spot where the aliens had hidden. As the lights began to come up again Mitchell jumped a

figure trying to get past them.

Marshall and Taylor had approached from the other side, and had apprehended the other one of the pair. McCoy came over to join them, and gave the aliens a quick scan.

"Just a few bruises - nothing that time won't cure."

"Good," said Kirk. "Mr. Mitchell, you and Taylor beam back up with the prisoners. Confine them - not together. We'll remain and see if we can find the elusive Commander Spock. I'm beginning to think he wants to stay here. Do we have any idea where the power controls are?"

Nyan said quietly, "They are one level down. Commander Spock had locked himself in. We were about to try the repair hatchways to try and recapture him. Er... Captain... he was injured when he escaped. These belts seem to use heat beams as a weapon. We had not realised their strength."

"How badly injured?" McCoy snapped.

"I don't know. He moved too fast for us."

Kirk frowned. "Gary, send Mr. Scott down in case we need to break in. McCoy, you and Marshall head for the main doors. I'll try the access way."

The Vulcan was barely conscious when Kirk reached him. Leaning over him, the Human called softly, "Spock, can you hear me?"

Heavy eyelids flickered open. The Vulcan seemed to be trying to say something. "Captain..." He lapsed into unconsciousness.

Kirk swore and reached for his communicator. "Uhura, I need an emergency medical team to the transporter room immediately."

McCoy had joined him by this time. He turned the Vulcan over gently. "My god, they were right about not knowing the strength of those weapons! I wish I knew a bit more about Vulcan physiology. Have us beamed up, Jim - I need to get him to sickbay."

Once back on board, Kirk headed for the bridge. "Mr. Mitchell, I want a full Security sweep through that base. I'll contact Starfleet and report. Hopefully they'll arrange for a Planetary Patrol vessel to come and take over."

An hour later found Kirk on his way to sickbay, where he found McCoy in his office.

"Oh hi, Jim. Everything sorted out?"

"More or less. How's Commander Spock? I need someone to turn off that defence system and get into the computer banks down there."

"Well, you'll need to wait. He's in what I understand to be a healing trance. According to Piper he needs to be brought out of it, so I just hope it's obvious when. Those burns were pretty nasty. I'm surprised he stayed on his feet as long as he did."

"It might have been better if he'd not insisted on trying to escape at all," Kirk grumbled. "This leaves me without two senior officers. I hope he doesn't mean to make a habit of it."

They walked from McCoy's office into the ward where Spock was lying.

"Careful what you say, Jim. He's not unconscious, and is probably aware of everything that is happening. Isn't it time you had something to eat and a rest, Captain? You definitely look as though a shower wouldn't do you any harm."

Kirk laughed. "Okay, McCoy, I know when I'm not wanted. Let me know immediately he regains consciousness."

"Aye aye, sir, but it could be a while. Burns don't heal overnight, even for supermen."

Spock came out of his trance several hours later. When McCoy forbade any movement on his part he said, "Very well, Doctor. I must therefore ask you to convey some information to Captain Kirk. The controls he wishes to find are on the main console, but are linked to a much smaller one. Both sets must be disengaged before the system can be turned off. If I remember correctly they are simple rocker switches in banks of four; I was not able to try them, but I assume that since with the other switches I used the upright was the off position, the same will apply here."

McCoy looked at him for a moment, vainly trying to remember what else he and Kirk had said. "Uh, right, I'll pass the message on. You... er... you try and get some sleep, or do you want a sedative?"

Elegant eyebrows rose. "No, thank you, Doctor. Most Terran sedatives have a deleterious effect on my system. I can induce sleep."

"Fine; well you just do it, then. I'll contact the Captain for you."

McCoy left and went to find Kirk. After he had passed on the information Kirk thanked him, then he watched as Kirk's eyes widened.

"I'm pretty damned sure we were in your office when I said that."

"So am I, Jim, and we were a good bit closer when you made your other comments."

"Shit! What do I do? Apologise? I seem to spend a lot of time apologising to that Vulcan. It's getting to be quite a habit."

"No, I don't think so, Jim. Leave it for the moment. I imagine with hearing as sensitive as that he must be used to hearing things he shouldn't."

"Maybe, but he shouldn't have to. We'll need to be a sight more careful in future."

"I'm hardly going to go around whispering, Jim."

"Nobody's asking you to, Bones. Just think before you open your mouth," Kirk grinned.

"Coming from you, sir, that's a good one." McCoy sounded indignant. He continued, "I'll keep Spock in sickbay today, but release him to his quarters tomorrow. He'll need light duties until the burns heal totally. You may find it best to order him to do it - I'll leave it in your capable hands, Captain." So saying he turned and left, chuckling to himself as he did so.

Spock made an attempt to return to duty the following day, and was informed that he had been relieved of duty until told otherwise. After he had left the bridge Mitchell moved over to Kirk.

"Er... Jim, Spock may take that as a reprimand, you know."

Kirk stared at him in amazement. "The man can't be fully recovered. If it was you or me we'd still be flat on our backs in sickbay. He's up and walking about, trying to impress when he doesn't need to, and you tell me he'll take it as a reprimand!"

"He's not trying to impress, Captain. He's not Human, he's a Vulcan - they react differently."

"Trying to tell me how to do my job now, Mr. Mitchell? When I need your advice I'll tell you. That will be all."

Mitchell seemed as though he was going to continue, but a look at Kirk's face showed him that discretion would be the better part of valour on this occasion. He returned to his seat and silence reigned over the bridge.

Kirk sat and brooded until lunchtime, when he escaped to his quarters, collecting McCoy along the way. Sitting at his desk his eye caught a neat pile of paperwork; flicking through it he saw it was Spock's report on the pirate base.

"When did he get the chance to do this, Bones?" he asked.

"Do what, Jim? Oh - I let him use one of the sickbay terminals yesterday evening. It seemed as good a way of keeping him quiet as any." McCoy handed Kirk another sheet of paper. "I've got the other one of these on my desk. As yet I haven't done anything about it."

Kirk stared at the form in disbelief. *Stupid idiot!* he thought, reaching for the intercom button.

McCoy raised a hand. "He's only next door. Why not go and speak to him?"

Kirk looked at him warily. "I'm not sure on my own ground, never mind trying to talk to him on his, but I guess you're right." Sighing, he got up. "I'll go now or I'll never do it. Wish I'd eaten first, though."

McCoy grinned at him. "That's my boy, Jim. Thinking of your stomach again. I'll see you later, maybe?"

Kirk looked at the piece of paper in his hand and not for the

first time thought, *Why me?* Standing up he metaphorically squared his shoulders and went to talk to Spock.

If the Vulcan was surprised to see him there was no evidence to show it. He invited Kirk in, offered him a seat, and then moved over to the thermostat to reduce the room temperature a little. Kirk couldn't resist a quick look round - the room seemed as alien to him as the man who occupied it. Spock sat back down, obviously trying not to be intimidating.

Kirk swallowed and began, "Spock, this transfer request - it's a bit premature, isn't it? We've hardly had time to get used to each other yet. I can see no reason for me to accept it, and I should be pleased if you'd reconsider. Let's give ourselves some time, shall we?"

Spock considered him for a while. "Captain, my request for a transfer was not made in a fit of pique, as you seem to be suggesting. I have thought about it for some time. I am not convinced that we are compatible, but if you think that more time may make a difference I shall withdraw the request for the moment."

Kirk breathed a sigh of relief; he could still hear Nogura. "Good, Spock," he said heartily. "I know I ordered you off the bridge this morning, but I wasn't intending to reprimand you. Dr. McCoy suggested that light duty would be most suitable for a few days."

"Yes, I had surmised that, Captain. However, I am capable of manning a computer station, and I do think that a thorough survey of the base and its systems is an important task. With your permission, of course, I intend to complete my work using my own console."

Kirk nodded. "I see no problem, Commander. However, do please remember to eat and sleep."

"Of course, Captain; and if I may be so bold, maybe you could also remember to do so."

Kirk felt a momentary flicker of irritation, and then realised that the Vulcan was only too correct. "Point taken, Commander. I was heading for the mess when I was interrupted by that piece of paper. Maybe you would like to accompany me?"

A grave look and a tilted eyebrow were his only answer; then, "After you, Captain."

Kirk got up and they moved towards the door, Kirk feeling unaccountably pleased with himself and the Vulcan considering how difficult understanding some Humans could be.

SAREK'S SON

by

Gloria Fry

As ordered by Starfleet Command, Captain James T. Kirk, accompanied by his First Officer, Commander Spock, beamed down to Starbase Ten.

"Well," Kirk remarked as they stepped down from the platform. "I wonder what 'goodies' they have for us this time?"

The Vulcan features took on a puzzled expression. "'Goodies', Captain?"

Jim Kirk smiled mischievously. He was delighted that he could still cause confusion in his Vulcan friend, even after the four years they had served together aboard the Enterprise. It was a game he never tired of, and he knew that Spock - although he would never admit to it - enjoyed it just as much.

"Orders, Spock... orders."

Spock raised his eyebrows in the familiar sign of impatience. "Then why did you not say so in the first place, sir? I fail to see why you take such pleasure in talking in riddles. It is illogical."

Kirk was about to continue the repartee but he suddenly caught sight of the reception committee which waited for them, and he regretfully turned to the business in hand. Commodore Fain, the Base Commander, watched them expectantly. Behind him stood three tall Vulcan officers, in Starfleet science blue; Kirk felt the slight startlement in Spock and he glanced at him for a second. Was it the sight of the other Vulcans which had caused the reaction in his usually unperturbable friend?

"Welcome to Starbase Ten," Fain said.

"Thank you, sir," Kirk replied.

"May I introduce Lt. Starn, Lt. Commander Soran and Commander T'Pau."

Kirk raised his hand in the Vulcan salute but he wondered what these Vulcan officers had made of that introduction. Surely Fain should have known better than to have introduced the lowest ranking officer first. He felt a sense of unease creeping up on him.

"Live long and prosper," he said. "Allow me to introduce my First Officer, Commander Spock."

He watched as Spock greeted them, especially the way he bowed gracefully to the woman who had the same name as Spock's head of family. He wondered if Spock knew her. His friend's face did not change, he was as calm as the other Vulcans, but Kirk sensed a slight unsureness from him. He knew Spock too well; they had been

through too much together. He frowned, wondering why these officers were here. There were still very few Vulcans in Starfleet and none - apart from Spock - served on non-Vulcan ships.

"Admiral Sharman is waiting for you," Fain said. "Please follow me."

He led them to the turbolift, talking all the time about trivialities. Something was up. Kirk knew it. He exchanged a long look with his First Officer. Both were very aware that they were going to be the recipients of some bureaucratic idiocy.

"Commodore... " he began.

"Your mission will continue as soon as we have finished here, Kirk. I'm sorry we had to divert you, but I'm sure you will understand."

Now Kirk was certain. Bureaucrats always liked to interfere in everything. He had no liking for them. What were they up to this time? And why all the secrecy? Why had the three Vulcan officers met them? His unease deepened.

As they reached the Commander's briefing room, Kirk deliberately fell in at Spock's side. They entered the room together. Fain's disapproval was plain but Kirk did not care; protocol was unimportant to him. Paper-pushers like Fain annoyed him. Perhaps technically Fain outranked him, but he would not allow the Commodore any respect which was not deserved.

A familiar figure sat beside Admiral Sharman and, aware of the sudden extreme tension in Spock's body, Kirk quickly moved forward to cover his friend and allow him time to recover.

"Admiral Sharman - Ambassador Sarek, greetings. It has been too long since our last meeting, Ambassador."

"Indeed," Sarek said, as he stood up.

Admiral Sharman rose to her feet. Kirk remembered her from the Academy. She had been one of his toughest lecturers, but she had not been impervious to his charm and had softened towards him. He smiled at her in the way he knew had always had an effect on her. It still worked, he saw. She was a handsome woman in her fifties; in fact she had not changed very much over the years.

"It has been many years," he said.

"Yes, Captain Kirk," she replied, with a smile. "Many years."

"Have you met my First Officer, Mr. Spock?" he said, turning to Spock, hoping that his friend had been able to find Vulcan calm again.

"I have not had the honour," she said, "but his fame has reached me, as has yours."

Kirk smiled at her remark, then looked at Sarek for a moment, but the Ambassador was totally unreadable as he stared at them... No, Kirk corrected himself, *as he stared at his son.*

Spock stepped to his Captain's side. "Admiral," he said and courteously bowed his head.

Kirk watched her reaction and tried to cover his grin. He had never met a woman yet who did not find Spock attractive. He saw it in the glimmer of her eyes.

Spock faced his father and they silently greeted one another in the Vulcan fashion.

"I come to serve," Spock said, bowing his head again, but Kirk noted that Spock bowed lower to his father than he had done to the Admiral. He caught Sharman's eye, and they moved to one side, allowing the two Vulcans certain privacy. Fain followed them, but the three other Vulcans stood impassively near the door.

"Captain," Sharman said. "Sarek thinks well of you."

Kirk was surprised. He had not thought that Sarek had a particularly good opinion of him. The journey to Babel had been an unfortunate time. It had brought Spock and his father together after eighteen years of silence, but Kirk did not believe that they were properly reconciled. Spock had never discussed it with him, and Kirk had the feeling that it was a subject better left alone.

"I am honoured," he said. "I have the greatest respect for Sarek."

"And for his son," Sharman commented.

"More than respect, Admiral."

Admiral Sharman exchanged glances with Fain. "The friendship of the Human Starship Captain and his Vulcan First Officer is something of a legend in Starfleet. It's considered the finest example of inter-species co-operation in the Federation. It's said that you are the most successful Captain in the history of Starfleet because of that friendship."

Kirk smiled slowly. He chose his words with care. "I wouldn't deny it, Admiral. Spock has pulled me - and the ship - out of the fire too often to count."

"Then this may be painful for you," Fain said abruptly.

Suspicion welled in Kirk. "What do you mean?" he asked icily, drawing himself up to his full height to look down at the man.

"Perhaps we will find that it will be more painful for Starfleet," Sharman said.

Fain stared at her in anger. "Do you reject the decision of the Admiralty?"

"I question it," she replied.

"Will someone put me in the picture?" Kirk asked, trying to control his rising apprehension. "What the hell is going on?"

The Admiral sighed, sat down on her chair, and said, "Please be seated, gentlemen."

Spock looked at his Captain, his eyes questioning. Kirk shrugged fractionally, smiled his most reassuring smile, then went over to sit beside him. He leaned close to him. "They're up to something, Spock," he murmured, his voice pitched very low.

Spock glanced at him, and nodded slightly.

Kirk sat back. "Ambassador Sarek," he said, as the other Vulcans seated themselves around the table. "What brings you to Starbase Ten?"

Sarek looked at him, and once again Kirk was impressed by this man; Spock's father. The power surrounding him was almost palpable. His dignity lay like a cloak around him, yet there was a strange gentleness about him.

"Captain, I am here on a diplomatic mission. I was informed yesterday that my son would be here. Admiral Sharman invited me to this meeting."

"I see. Thank you, sir." The tension in the room was beginning to wear Kirk's nerves down. He decided to get to the point.

"Admiral, will you and Commodore Fain stop beating around the bush!"

Fain appeared annoyed by Kirk's lack of decorum, but Sharman only smiled a little. She liked Jim Kirk. It was only the outspoken, the questioning, the exceptional individual who had the guts, the qualities for his chosen profession. Kirk had all the right abilities for Starship command. She decided that he deserved to be told the facts as plainly as possible.

"Gentlemen, as you know, five of our Starships have run into serious difficulties in the last year. Two were totally destroyed, and the others were severely damaged, with great loss of life. We must have a viable fleet and we have been working around the clock on assembling the ships we have in Space Dock. Two are complete, and we are working on the final crew placements. However, the most difficult positions to fill are the ones at the top. Very few people are capable of Starship command. We have made many mistakes in the past, and we have learned." She paused as she saw Kirk's horrified expression. "Captain Kirk - " she started.

Kirk knew what was coming. He realised that, deep down, he had suspected it the moment he had seen the three Vulcans in the transporter room. He grew very angry. What right did they have to take his most valuable officer from him? Damn desk-bound paper-pushers! What the hell did they know? Barely able to contain his outrage, he stared at Spock. The outraged glare that met his was like a balm. He relaxed slightly.

"Starfleet Command," continued the Admiral, "has nominated Mr. Spock as Captain of the U.S.S. Surak."

Kirk noted that Spock and Sarek raised their eyebrows in wrenchingly similar fashion at the name of the Starship.

"It has been named to honour the Vulcan people, Mr. Spock. You will command a ship of 430 Vulcans. You were first choice for Captain of this ship. Your experience as First Officer of the Enterprise made you the logical choice."

A wave of deep apprehension passed through Kirk at the Admiral's words. He had always been sure that Spock did not want his own command, but could he be wrong? Perhaps, secretly, Spock did wish a captaincy. Certainly he had tasted it, when Kirk had

been injured or missing. Often he had had difficulty with the Humans under his command; perhaps he would welcome commanding a ship of logical Vulcan scientists, beings who could keep up with him in matters Humans could not begin to understand. Kirk wiped the sweat from his forehead. He had no right to expect that Spock would stay with him always. He could not stand in the way of such an able officer. He could not hold back his friend's career. Slowly, he became aware of Spock's eyes upon him, and he swallowed convulsively, as the complete loyalty in that intent gaze penetrated his senses. His fears dissolved in a sudden rush of warmth for his friend, and he silently asked his forgiveness for having doubted him for even one moment. He saw the expression in Spock's eyes change and he knew that he had been heard. Sometimes the understanding between them was uncanny. He smiled, knowing that he had been forgiven his momentary and, Spock would say, illogical fears.

The silence in the room was deafening as the Vulcan and Human stared at one another. The other Vulcans respectfully lowered their eyes and retreated behind their mental shields to allow the two some privacy. Sharman and Fain watched openly, but even they were aware of the communication between Kirk and his First Officer.

Assured that his Captain was settled, Spock stood up, clasped his hands behind his back and turned his attention to the Admiral. "I am honoured by Starfleet's decision, Admiral Sharman; however, I refuse the appointment."

Kirk's sigh of relief was loud to Spock's ears. The jolt of sheer joy at the words was so intense that Spock's composure was severely rocked. He fought to maintain his dignity, aware that Jim too had realised that his powerful feelings were causing difficulties. Spock wondered if the Vulcans in the room could pick any of this up. Sarek's telepathy was minimal, but he did not know the others. He sensed little from them, but perhaps they were tightly shielded.

"How can you refuse a captaincy, Mr. Spock?" Fain asked in amazement. "The glory, the excitement, the power..."

All eyes turned to the Commodore and Spock tried to contain his disdain. Obviously Fain had little knowledge of Starship command.

"Commodore," he replied, "as a Vulcan, my first duty lies in my scientific duties. I believe I have contributed to the advancement of knowledge in my years as a Starfleet Science Officer. If I was Captain of the U.S.S. Surak, I would not be able to pursue my studies, my experiments and my projects." He turned to look at Kirk. "The captaincy requires special skills which Captain Kirk has in abundance. My first loyalty is to him. I am content to be his Science Officer and his second in command." Kirk smiled at him in acknowledgement of his words, and after a slight bow to the Captain, he faced the Admiral again. "I believe that I am of more value to the Federation in that capacity."

Kirk took a deep breath. The depth of Spock's loyalty to him never failed to amaze him. Sometimes he wondered how he had gained such a prize. He knew he was the envy of Starfleet. How many other ship commanders had asked him what it was like to have the loyalty and friendship of a Vulcan? Of all the species of the Federation, the Vulcans were the most respected and admired. Take such a friend from him? Never...

The Admiral drummed her fingers on the table. "Mr. Spock, you

have successfully commanded the Enterprise on many occasions."

"Indeed, Admiral Sharman. I found it most unpleasant. The ship did not function at full efficiency without Captain Kirk. He is the true master of the Enterprise."

Sharman looked from Spock to Kirk in admiration. She had never seen such loyalty. From a Vulcan to a Human, it was unique. She studied Kirk's face, seeing how delighted he was with his officer's words, how proud he was. He had every right to these feelings, but she wondered how he had been able to win that loyalty. She remembered Kirk from his Academy days, a young, quiet boy who gradually changed, blossoming out with the wonder of the knowledge his teachers imparted to him. Even then he was a leader, and she knew that he was destined for the highest position in Starfleet. She took pride that she had contributed in some small part to his achieving Starship command.

There was a deep silence for a time, then Sarek spoke. "You do my son great honour, Admiral Sharman; however, I must agree with him." He looked at Spock. "Captain Kirk leaves him free to continue his quest for knowledge. We on Vulcan study his findings. He could not have learned so much from the Vulcan Science Academy."

Spock bowed his head at his father's words, and Kirk grinned, delighted that at last Sarek had admitted that he had been wrong to oppose Spock's Starfleet career.

"Spock is one of the foremost scientists in the galaxy," Sarek continued. "It would be illogical to take him from such work. We would all be the poorer." He paused, stared intently at Sharman and added, "Starship Captains are not easy to find. Spock would make an excellent Captain, but it would be a grave error for him at this time. It would be a serious, perhaps dangerous mistake for the Enterprise and Starfleet."

Kirk continued the attack. "Sarek speaks the truth," he said. "You have lost five Starships. Have you considered why?"

"We have investigated every one," Fain defended. "Klingons, instrument failure..."

"Commodore," Kirk interrupted, "I have been called the most successful Captain in the history of Starfleet." He rose to stand by Spock's side. "Why is that so? I'll tell you - my success lies with my crew, our capability for teamwork, our ability to live together in mutual respect. We are welded together by friendship, purpose and deep regard." He took a deep breath and drew on his skill as an orator. "Mr. Spock's knowledge, his special Vulcan abilities, have wrenched triumph out of the jaws of defeat. His brilliant mind has overcome incredible situations which would have defeated anyone but a Vulcan. I say to you - integrate more Vulcans into all-worlds' ships." He stared at Sarek. "Sir, do not allow your people to isolate themselves from us. Why can they not follow Spock's lead? Return to working with non-Vulcans. I know it is difficult for you to work with us; it was for Spock. I believe, though, that he has found certain compensations. Teach us, as Spock has taught me. Allow others the privilege of serving with Vulcans. Spock's presence aboard the Enterprise has enriched the lives of all the crew. There are none who have not been affected by his lectures, his training programmes, his wisdom. Lives have been saved by his lessons. All of us have the greatest respect and admiration for him. He is much loved aboard the Enterprise."

Sarek's eyebrows rose, but he did not reply.

Kirk sped on. "His patience, courtesy and dignity are an example to us all." He turned his attention to Sharman and Fain. "On a more personal level, he is my right hand, my other self, the perfect balance for me. He's my closest friend - even more than friend. He's my chosen brother. If I honestly thought that this captaincy was the correct position for him, and that he wished it, I would not oppose him. He is an exceptional commander, but his greatest brilliance is as Science Officer. You do Starfleet a disservice if you think otherwise." He stopped for a few moments, aware that his onslaught had shocked them all. He controlled his passion a little. "With respect, Starfleet is mainly controlled by officers who have seen little Starfleet duty; they cannot understand what makes a ship happy or efficient."

"That is unfair, Kirk," Fain protested.

Kirk tried to hold on to his temper. It would not do their case any good to anger a superior officer like Fain, but he was not going to allow a paper-pushing Commodore to dictate to him.

"Sir, when were you last on Starship duty?"

Fain seemed startled. "I... Thirty years ago, I believe."

"In what capacity?"

"Ensign on engineering duty."

Kirk gave him a knowing look. "I see," he said. "And what are your memories of your Captain and senior officers?"

Spock watched his Captain with admiration. Jim could intimidate even senior officers, if he wished it. His powers of verbal persuasion were considerable, as were his other persuasive abilities. Spock noted how Admiral Sharman had already been swayed by him. It was only a matter of time before Fain followed. Jim would not allow the Admiralty to take away his First Officer, his friend. Spock knew that his determined Human friend would try anything to prevent that.

Fain's expression grew troubled. "They all died during a Klingon attack. I was one of only twenty survivors."

Kirk went in for the kill. Spock knew that look. He had seen it when Jim was particularly determined to win, despite the odds against him. "Why was there such loss of life? Why was your ship destroyed?"

"Captain Erikson was a quiet, dour man. He was disliked by his crew." Fain stared at him, his eyes showing the pain of a past he had perhaps thought forgotten. "There were many different factions on the ship, so much disharmony. Duty negligence was blamed for the failure of the photon torpedoes."

Kirk clamped down on his natural compassion for the man. "That would never happen on my ship," he snapped. "All my crew are loyal to me. There are no factions. I'm aware that it still goes on in some ships, even now; but I have the complete loyalty of my First Officer. If I go off the rails at any time, he will tell me. If he disagrees with me, he will voice it. If I make an error, he will inform me. If the situation warrants it, *I will take orders from*

him. He is the best First Officer in the Fleet. You will not take him from me."

Admiral Sharman sighed deeply. "Your opinion merits consideration, Captain. I will convene a meeting of the Council of Admirals. Off the record, I agree with you. Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, I will do my best."

"Thank you, Admiral," Kirk said gratefully.

"It has never been said that your ship lacks efficiency, Kirk. All Starfleet knows of the loyalty of your crew, and of the personal charisma of the one who inspires it." She studied Spock. "Have you never wished command, Mr. Spock?"

He shook his head. "No, Admiral. I only wish to continue serving on the Enterprise."

"As you may have guessed, these three officers would be part of your senior crew aboard the Surak."

He did not reply, and after a moment she nodded. "Very well. Remain on base. I'll notify you of the decision of the Council."

Kirk grew alarmed. "I've matters to attend to aboard my ship. If you will excuse us, please notify us there."

He did not think that Starfleet would try to enforce anything, but there was a strong Security presence at the Starbase and he would not feel safe until he was on board his ship.

"Very well," she said with the trace of a smile, but Fain did not look pleased.

"Would you care to come aboard, Sarek?" Kirk asked. "And you also, gentlemen?" he added to the three silent Vulcans.

Sarek agreed immediately. T'Pol looked at her companions for a moment, then answered for them. "We would be honoured to visit the Enterprise."

Kirk noted for the first time just how beautiful she was. All Vulcan women were aristocratic, remote, unapproachable. He took control over his natural instincts. She would be bonded, and even if she were not, she would have no interest in a Human.

He did not feel safe until they were aboard the Enterprise. He stepped down from the transporter platform, glanced possessively round the room, then turned to face the Vulcans.

"Well, Spock. You're a very popular person today! We'll fight them all the way. Take you from the Enterprise? Fools!" He grinned. "We won't make it easy for them, Spock. I'll argue their decision all the way to the top if I have to." As a sudden thought came to him, he became serious. "Spock, you are sure. I mean, you didn't refuse this appointment for my sake?" He stared up at his First Officer worriedly.

Spock sensed the curiosity from the other Vulcans; apart from Sarek, they would have little experience of Humans. They would wonder at the words of his Captain. The Human capacity for self-doubt would be alien to them.

"Captain," he said reassuringly, "I refused the appointment because I wish to stay on the Enterprise. I will not abandon my friend, my Captain, for Starship command. They will find a Vulcan Captain for the Surak. They will not find a command team such as is on the Enterprise on any other ship. It is illogical to split us up."

Kirk's relief was profound. He reached out, but remembering the company with them, he drew back his hand. "You are correct, as always, Mr. Spock. You may take some time off."

"But, Captain... "

"Your father is here," Kirk insisted. "You must wish to talk with him."

"Indeed, sir. Thank you."

Kirk turned to the three Vulcan officers. "May I show you around my ship?" T'Pol bowed slightly in acceptance.

As he toured the ship with the Vulcans, Kirk was aware of their interest in everything, their curiosity so like Spock's. He wondered what it would have been like if more Vulcans had served on his ship. Would Spock have become as close to him? Or would he have preferred the company of other Vulcans, given the chance? He caught himself. He was being insecure about his friendship with Spock. Why? There was no reason. Spock had made it plain enough that he wished to stay. Kirk hoped the Admiralty would see sense. He would make them!

Sarek and Spock walked in silence to Spock's quarters; the interested stares of the crew followed them. All were aware of the incidents during the journey to Babel. All knew of the reputation of the Vulcan Ambassador. Once in his cabin, Spock stood stiffly, his hands behind his back, uncomfortable as he always was in his father's presence. Although they were on speaking terms, they were not close, as father and son should be. At best there was a guarded truce between them. Spock tried not to shift under Sarek's gaze.

"Is Amanda well?" he finally asked.

"She is well," Sarek replied, "but Humans age more quickly than Vulcans."

"Indeed," Spock said quickly, "but that does not make them inferior."

"I did not say that," Sarek responded harshly.

"I ask your pardon," Spock said formally.

Sarek studied him for a long moment, then also clasped his hands behind his back. "Captain Kirk has spoken of the respect this crew has for you. I understand that. He mentioned also... the love... they bear you... On a purely academic level, I wish to know how they can feel love for one who cannot return that feeling."

Spock stared at him, uncertain how to reply. "Sarek," he said carefully. "You should know of Human love; Amanda loves you."

"I have never understood it, but she is my wife. Humans expect love in such a relationship. She is a remarkable woman."

Spock clenched his hands tightly together. His father's disapproval pained him deeply. He longed to be reconciled to him. He remembered certain moments from his childhood when his achievements had gained Sarek's approval, he desperately wished for that approval now. Despite the earlier comment about the Vulcan Science Academy, Spock knew that there were too many years of silent bitterness between them.

"Humans need to love," he said after some consideration, "and they need to be loved in return. I have studied them carefully over the years. I have found them to be illogical, unpredictable, but they strive to overcome their shortcomings. They believe that love is the most important thing in their lives. The ancient commandment 'Love thy neighbour' is truer today than ever before in Human history."

"You do not answer my question, Spock," Sarek said sharply.

Illogical shivers of apprehension ran up and down Spock's back at his father's words. Sarek still intimidated him.

"I do not know," he said slowly. "There are theories, however."

"Explain."

In an effort to control his emotions, Spock took a deep, calming breath. "Strength and power have always been attractive to Humans. I am physically stronger than any Human, and I have much power as First Officer of the Enterprise. Intellectual capacity is also admired; mathematical and deductive abilities are appreciated. Telepathic power has always fascinated them; my eidetic memory intrigues them; my appearance interests them."

Sarek raised an eyebrow.

"As you know," Spock continued, "Human legend abounds in tales of devils with pointed ears."

"On first contact Humans were afraid and repulsed by our appearance," Sarek conceded.

"It is the fascination of the unknown. I am different from them; there is a certain mystery about me."

"All these facts do not justify love," Sarek insisted.

Spock squared his shoulders. He felt as if he were being put under an inquisition. His father's eyes never left him. He gathered his courage. "Human literature is filled with heroes with similar characteristics to Vulcans, who protect them from evil forces. I may appear satanic to them, but they know I am bred to peace. They trust me."

Sarek studied his son with careful scrutiny, aware that he was disturbing him; knowing that Spock, a Starfleet Commander and First Officer of the most renowned ship of the Fleet, was as nervous as a child before him. He felt a strong surge of compassion for him, and a great deal of pride. He struggled to maintain control of his feelings. Spock was gifted with strong telepathy.

"I believe you have cemented more alliances than I," he said.

Spock inclined his head. "You overstate my abilities, sir."

"No, I have always understated them."

Spock felt a glimmer of pride at his father's words. He beat it back and bowed his head, showing his respect for Sarek, but also to hide his eyes from the piercing gaze of the other Vulcan.

Sarek remembered how lonely Spock had been as a boy. Neither Vulcan nor Human, but an explosive mix of the two species. Amanda had suffered torments over Spock's battles with his dual nature and Sarek, although he had never indicated it to his wife and son, had also empathised with the boy. He had been rigidly strict, and sometimes unconsciously cruel to his son, expecting him to be a model Vulcan, demanding that he suppress all Human traits, making the child ashamed of his Humanness. His attitude had driven Spock into Starfleet at a very young age. Spock's brilliant academic ability had made him a candidate to be prized, and he had quickly risen in the ranks to the top position for any Vulcan, the most honoured position of all; Science Officer. Yet Sarek in all his stubbornness had rejected his son for daring to enter Starfleet instead of the Vulcan Science Academy. He had not meant the estrangement to last as long as it had, and he had finally admitted to himself during the journey to Babel, aboard this very ship, that he wanted to be reconciled with his son.

They had achieved a wary communication after Spock - with considerable risk to himself - had donated his blood during the tricky heart surgery done by the Enterprise's eccentric Chief Medical Officer, but everything Sarek had wished to say had been left unsaid. He had gone to the Babel conference frustrated and pained by the lost opportunity. He vowed that he would make it up to his son somehow... but it was difficult to talk to his remote, tense child. The words did not come out the way he intended them.

"About the Human - Kirk," he said, his voice sounding harsh even to his own ears.

Spock tensed more. It was the one subject he feared the most. Sarek's opinion of his friendship with Jim.

"He is my friend."

"Friendship between Vulcan and Human is... unusual."

"He is an unusual man," Spock replied. "He has on occasion risked everything to save my life."

"A commander's duty," Sarek said.

"No," Spock said. He was not going to let his father intimidate him over this. Sarek had no right. Jim's friendship was too important to him; he would allow no-one to question it. It was too personal a thing.

"It is more than a commander's duty. He is my brother according to the ancient tradition of Vulcan. We have touched in the friendship bond, never to be broken; you will respect that, sir."

Sarek raised an eyebrow, his features showing surprise. "How

can a Human return the bond of brotherhood?"

"He has returned it, in his way."

"Then he must indeed be an exceptional being."

"He is," Spock said. "His friendship gave me an end to loneliness. I am his balance and he is mine."

"Then you are truly fortunate, Spock. I will accept him as my son."

The wave of emotion at Sarek's words almost overwhelmed Spock. He had not dared to believe that his father would accept his bond of friendship with Jim as valid, that he would accept him as an adopted member of the family, as if he were a Vulcan. Friendship ties amongst Vulcans were powerful and binding unto death. Vulcans did not generally believe Humans capable of such a deep commitment, and did not enter into relationships with them.

"I thank thee," he said, bowing deeply. He struggled to control his emotions, gained some measure of success, and indicated a seat to his father. "Would you care to hear my theory on Quantum-electro-dynamics?"

"A new theory?" Sarek asked, as he sat down.

"Yes, sir," Spock replied, sitting opposite him. He had brought himself under control now, but he wondered how Jim would feel about having been accepted as a son of Sarek and Amanda.

Kirk escorted the three Vulcans to the transporter room. They had taken everything in during the tour, and had occasionally asked polite questions. They had been totally unreadable to him, although he had had years of experience of reading a Vulcan. Yet, Kirk pondered, Spock was half-Human and unique unto himself. These three were full Vulcans and unused to Humans - but certain memories returned to Kirk of his first impressions of Spock. Cold - much colder than these three officers.

"I thank you, Captain Kirk," Commander T'Pau said. "It was most interesting."

Kirk smiled at her. He saw that it made no impression on her perfect features. "You will forgive me if I win my fight to keep my First Officer."

For the first time he saw surprise register on their faces.

"Mr. Spock is a legend on our world," T'Pau said. "So is his friendship with his Captain. This offer should not have been made. I wish you success, sir, even though it would rob us of our most respected officer in Starfleet."

Her answer only served to confuse Kirk. He watched as they were beamed back to Starbase Ten. Who could understand the ways of Vulcans? What did her words mean? Their customs and beliefs still puzzled him. Sighing deeply, he left the transporter room. He would go to Spock and Sarek; perhaps they would enlighten him.

Spock rose as he came in. Kirk smiled at him and waved him back to his seat. Spock's natural courtesy was something he had always appreciated. He drew up a chair beside him, and sat down.

"Am I interrupting something?" he asked.

"Indeed, Captain," Spock said, honest as always. "I am showing Sarek my new theory."

"Oh. What theory is this?"

"I will show you."

Kirk groaned after a few minutes. He was lost already. It took him weeks, sometimes months, if ever, to understand Spock's complicated theories. After all these years, it had become something of a joke between them.

"Spock," he said helplessly, "why is it never something simple? Why do you do this to me?" He stared at his friend, his eyes twinkling.

Spock almost smiled. He shut off the screen. "In essence, Captain... "

Kirk shook his head. "I don't think I am up to it right now. Later... maybe."

"Indeed, Captain. Perhaps next week?"

Jim laughed, but as he suddenly realised that there was a possibility that Spock might not be with him next week if the Admiralty had their way, he sobered up.

At the same moment Spock also realised it and they shared a long look of apprehension.

"I will assist you in any way that I can," Sarek said, startling them. "What they intend is wrong. I will plead your case. I am not inexperienced in such matters."

"I thank you, sir," Kirk said. "And - I would like to ask you if there are other reasons, apart from the obvious, for offering Spock this appointment?"

He saw the surprise on Spock's face - also something played across the distinguished features of the older Vulcan. Sarek was silent for a minute, but Kirk knew that he was about to speak. He waited with barely concealed impatience.

Sarek seemed to cast aside his usual diplomatic manner. "I have noticed that certain persons in Starfleet Command do not have the knowledge necessary for running a Fleet. They do not understand how a ship runs successfully. If they did, they would not consider parting two who have joined in brotherhood. Even the Vulcans in Starfleet are remiss in this matter. I will inform them, and will insist on their compliance with Vulcan tradition. The Enterprise is the pride of Starfleet. Her reputation will be at stake if they do as they intend. My sons, I will leave now."

Kirk grew puzzled. Had he heard correctly? He felt Spock's hand on his arm, and turned to face him.

"Sarek accepts you as an adopted son," Spock said gently.

"Spock...?" Kirk asked, unsure of all the ramifications of this.

"When we entered into the bond of friendship, we joined in a brotherhood just as strong as the tie of blood. Under Vulcan law, you are part of my family. Sarek is willing to accept you in this way. It means that you will be as a son to him. Will you accept him as your father?"

Tears filled Jim's eyes as he remembered his own father and the few, precious times they had been together. Both his father and brother were dead, but he had found a new brother in Spock. However, Sarek - a father to him! Spock's grip on his arm tightened, and he gained a measure of control. He blinked away the tears and looked at the Vulcan Ambassador.

"I am deeply honoured, sir."

Sarek accepted his words graciously. "The honour is mine, Kirk," he said. "I only regret that I did not know until today of your bond with Spock. No matter, I accept you into my family and bid you welcome. You are now a member of one of Vulcan's most distinguished families. You have all the rights that go with that privilege."

Kirk's throat was tight with emotion; he could barely swallow. He turned to Spock. "Why did you never tell me?"

"I did not know if Sarek would accept a Human as my brother. I had not spoken to him for many years. I ask your forgiveness; I should have informed you."

Kirk smiled. Life was strange, and it got stranger all the time. He had a family he knew nothing about, and he wanted to know. Spock would have to tell him all the details now. He could not hide behind that strict, Vulcan privacy any more.

Spock shifted uncomfortably under Jim's smile and Sarek's scrutiny. He glanced down, trying to hide the flush on his cheeks. He should have told Jim of this before, even without Sarek's approval. Like so many things, it was difficult for him. At the time he had been trying to understand how his friendship with Jim had formed; so many other things had happened too that he had never had the opportunity to explain....

Sarek rose. "I bid you farewell. You have much to discuss."

Quickly the two officers stood. Spock was suddenly loathe to see his father leave. Jim would question him. He would persist until Spock revealed the details of the Vulcan family and traditions he now belonged to. Spock took a deep breath. Even with Jim, it was still difficult to open out fully, despite the years of a friendship which had become the mainstay of his life.

"I will escort you to the transporter room, Sarek," he said, trying to delay the inevitable. He turned to Kirk. "With your permission, Captain."

Kirk nodded. He was bemused by the revelations of the past few minutes and he was desperate to know more about his new status as a member of one of the leading families on Vulcan. Patience was not

one of his virtues, but he made an attempt to control his curiosity. He faced Sarek and bowed to him as he had seen Spock do, hoping that he was showing the proper respect. He knew that Vulcans valued courtesy highly, and hoped he had learnt something from Spock about it.

"It was my pleasure to see you again, sir," he said as he straightened. "My warmest regards to Amanda."

Sarek bowed slightly and held out his hand in the Vulcan greeting. Kirk returned it.

"Live long and prosper, my son," Sarek said. "I believe with Spock at your side you will indeed live long."

Spock stared at his father in surprise at his openness, then he looked at Jim, seeing the complete agreement on his face. Jim's eyes met his, and they were full of happiness and curiosity. Those eyes seemed to say to him, 'You have a lot of explaining to do, my friend'. He raised his eyebrows and saw the laughter forming in response. With a certain alacrity, he followed Sarek out of the door.

He dismissed the duty officer and prepared the transporter himself. His father stood at his side, watching him.

"Ready, Sarek," Spock said, facing him. They saluted one another in the Vulcan fashion. There was a long silence.

"Take great care of your Captain," Sarek said, at last. "He is vulnerable to the political manoeuvring within Starfleet."

Spock tried to restrain his worry at those words. "Indeed," he said, waiting for his father to say more.

"When your mission ends, it will have been the most successful starship mission in the history of Starfleet. There are some who will capitalise on that. There are, regretfully, others who do not care for the concept of IDIC in the leadership of the Enterprise. Some of the latter are involved in a bid to oust you from your position here."

Spock hesitated. Was he understanding his father correctly?

"Are you saying that there is prejudice yet? That there are still people who fear Vulcans?"

"I say, regretfully, that there are ones who fear Human influence on us."

In his years as a Starfleet officer, Spock had come up against prejudice but it had been minor and had always been resolved. To hear that Vulcans harboured prejudice against Humans shocked him deeply. He did not let it show. He clamped it down tightly, relentlessly.

"My son," Sarek said with unusual gentleness. His telepathy was at the lower end of the scale for a Vulcan, but it was enough to pick up the powerful feelings from his son. "I work against it, as do others. Do not concern yourself. I will defend my wife, my son and his chosen brother unto the end."

Spock bowed deeply to him, and Sarek smiled slightly as he

stared at the glossy black hair which was identical in shading to his own as a youth. This son of his, half-Human as he was, knew the proper respect of his Vulcan heritage. It was intolerable that certain full Vulcans did not.

"Farewell, my child. Live long and prosper," he said.

Spock straightened to his full height. "Live long and prosper, my father," he said, his eyes regarding Sarek with respect.

Sarek allowed the gentle smile to return, and saw how the expression in his son's eyes changed to one of love. Painfully, he was reminded of Amanda. He sighed. This was his chance to make up for all those years of estrangement. He had to take it. He must find within himself the ability to reach his much valued son. Reaching for the Vulcan ritual joining of fingertips, he noted how quickly Spock returned the gesture. Their fingertips met.

For several long moments their thoughts touched and they were truly Vulcan father and son, communicating in complete understanding. Sarek broke the contact before their thoughts became too intimate, but he was sure that he had given Spock a glimpse of his innermost self. He walked to the transporter pad, a trifle dazed by the power of Spock's telepathy. Even for a Vulcan, it was strong. Perhaps the contacts with so many alien beings had trained Spock more than the average Vulcan. Sarek had caught tantalising snippets... the alien Horta with its not-so-alien mother instincts; Nomad, the sentient machine; the Kelvan, a multi-tentacled being from another galaxy; the evil Hegya, the Enyadi; Kirk, the one Spock had been in contact with most often and the most deeply. A Human who loved and trusted his son as a brother in the peculiar, intense way of his species; a way Spock was still uncomfortable with at times, but had accepted.

Slowly Spock let out the breath he had been holding. Then, as there was no more to say, he sent his father back to Starbase Ten. He stood there for a minute, reliving the short time he had been closer to Sarek than he had ever been. He had read his father's regard for him, and his pride. He allowed himself the feeling of relief. Many years of bitterness and misunderstanding had been swept away. The mind-touch they had shared had been like an embrace.

It was several hours later when Spock arrived in Kirk's quarters. Kirk did not question him on the delay, even though he knew when Sarek had beamed back to the starbase. He knew Spock well enough to realise that his friend needed some time alone.

"I want to talk to you," he said, pointing a finger at him. "You have a great deal to tell me - 'my brother'."

Spock lowered his eyes and Jim, on seeing his obvious embarrassment, relented somewhat. "I mean, I know we have always considered one another as brothers, Spock," he added, more gently. "But I was not aware that I really am your brother, according to Vulcan law. It takes a little getting used to."

He came around his desk, and stood close to his friend, facing him. "There is still so much I do not understand - so much I don't know about you. How long have we known one another?"

"Four years, one month, three days, five hours, sixteen minutes, twenty three seconds, ship's time," Spock replied tonelessly.

Helpless laughter bubbled up within Jim. He grabbed Spock's arms for support as he doubled up, unable to stop his mirth. Even now, Spock was able to break him up with that meticulous exactness of his. How did he do it? It had always amazed him.

Spock stared at him in confusion. "Am I incorrect, Captain?" he said. "Are you all right?" he added.

Kirk nodded, unable to speak, but when Uhura's voice came over the intercom announcing that Admirals Sharman and Komack wished to speak with him, he quickly sobered. He stood beside his First Officer, clasping his hands behind his back in the same manner as Spock was doing, and swallowed convulsively. He took a long moment to exchange a look with his friend, then he replied, "Pipe it down here. Put it on scramble."

Komack was on long distance relay from Starbase One. His holographic image stood beside that of Admiral Sharman.

"Kirk," he said. "Causing trouble as usual."

"Sir - " Kirk began.

"There is a disturbance along with Romulan Neutral Zone. There has been conflict in the Zimia star system. Enterprise is the only ship to have had dealings with the Romulans before. You will proceed to Zimia immediately."

Kirk braced himself. "Sir, I must have Mr. Spock with me. His experience with the Romulans is greater than my own."

Komack smiled. "Your combined experience is even better, Kirk. Starfleet has withdrawn its offer to Mr. Spock. The majority have ruled that he serves us better as your First Officer. Success to you, gentlemen."

Kirk grinned widely as he heard the news. He felt the tension drain from Spock. He sighed, suddenly feeling light-headed.

As Komack's image disappeared, Sharman smiled at them. "I put your case to the Admiralty but I believe Sarek's influence won the day for you. Mr. Spock, there are very few officers who would refuse a promotion, but I believe you have made the correct decision. Good luck, gentlemen. Your orders follow."

"Thank you, Admiral," Kirk said gratefully. "I believe your influence helped our case also."

She smiled. "Sharman out."

The Captain and First Officer of the U.S.S. Enterprise viewed their new orders. The Human was barely able to control his impatience until the transmission ended. He called the bridge.

"Mr. Scott, you have the con for the next shift. Lay in a course for Zimia. Warp factor five."

He switched off his intercom and looked at the Vulcan. "You have much to explain, Mr. Spock."

"Indeed," Spock replied, raising an enquiring eyebrow.

"I want to know exactly who I am now related to, and what it means to be adopted into a Vulcan family."

Spock swallowed nervously. He did not quite know how to answer the question, for no Human had ever been part of a Vulcan family before, except for his mother. That was different, though, being a marriage tie. However, Sarek had accepted Jim, which should mean that Jim would have the same rights as any Vulcan in such a situation. After what Sarek had told him about the attitudes of certain Vulcans, though, Spock was unsure.

"Spock," Jim said intently. "Stop being so reticent about this."

"T'Pol is now your liege and you must obey her commands," Spock replied, the Vulcan in him disapproving of the shock he was giving to Jim; the Human in him delighting in his friend's open-mouthed horror. "She is the Head of our family, and she will expect your homage when you return to Vulcan."

Kirk gulped. "After what happened last time, she'll kill me! She does not approve of me or McCoy."

He remembered how intimidating she was. A frail old woman, but power radiated from her, and strong Vulcan males did her bidding. He had felt that power also. He had seen Spock kneel to her. What kind of woman could control the strength and will of Vulcan men?

"Will I have to kneel at her feet?" he asked with trepidation.

"Indeed, Jim. It will be expected."

"I see," Jim exclaimed. He chewed at his lip. "I'll have to practise my humility. I'm not very good at that."

"Indeed you are not," Spock agreed. "But I will give you lessons in Vulcan etiquette. You will learn, as you have learned many things from me."

Jim Kirk groaned. He suspected that the learning of Vulcan etiquette would be as difficult as the learning of Vulcan martial arts, Vulcan meditation, Vulcan music, Vulcan languages, Vulcan philosophy... Well, he would allow his particular Vulcan to teach him just about anything, but he wondered if he dared ask any more. He had the feeling that it would be most uncomfortable.

"She has the power to give you in marriage," Spock added, trying to keep the amusement out of his voice.

"WHAT!!!" Jim thundered.

"Indeed. She will choose your bride, if she wishes it. She does not have to give you the choice."

Kirk grabbed his friend by the shoulders and shook him hard. "You are enjoying this." He could see the warmth in those dark eyes, the twinkle there.

"I can assure you, Captain, that Vulcans do not know what enjoyment is. Enjoyment is an emotional state and, as you know, Vulcans have no emotions."

A wide grin covered Jim's face. He could see that Spock was enjoying himself immensely at his expense, but he did not mind. If Spock's friendship meant that he had to attend T'Pau's every whim for a week, a month, he would do so. That friendship was worth any price... He hesitated. But given in marriage! Could T'Pau really do that? Surely not. Yet, he remembered how T'Pring, in rejecting Spock, had been prepared to become the property of the victor. Vulcan law was very peculiar....

"Tell me more, Spock," he said warily. "Please don't spare me the hair-raising details."

The edges of Spock's mouth turned up, threatening a smile. Jim held his breath. Smiles from Spock were rarer than Meronite Crystal. He caught a glimpse of a very slight smile, and he laughed with delight.

"Would you care to hear about the ritual of male subjugation to the female?" Spock asked innocently.

Jim's eyes widened. "Spock!!!" he exclaimed, as all kinds of fearful visions crossed his mind.

He started to laugh again. It was his own fault. He had taught a Vulcan how to tease.

Was Spock teasing????????

A KLINGON CURSE

Curse the Enterprise, Kirk and all his crew!
I'll rip them apart and use them for Klingon stew.
Get these tribbles out of here - give me some more space
While I think of what I'll do to Kirk and all his race!

These tribbles I swear the Earthers did invent.
I'll see them all destroyed if it takes till time is spent.
But first the end of the Enterprise and those on board -
I'll see that slimeworm Kirk tremble at the Klingon roar!

So turn this ship around, back to our own base.
I shall plot revenge upon this weakling race.
Now where can I lay the blame for a plan that's come undone
So that I can remain a favoured Klingon son?

Helen Connor